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# LABOUR IN INDIA

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# LABOUR IN INDIA

*A STUDY OF THE CONDITIONS OF  
INDIAN WOMEN IN MODERN  
INDUSTRY*

BY  
JANET HARVEY KELMAN

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## INTRODUCTORY NOTE

DURING a visit to India of some sixteen months, from December 1920 to March 1921, I had the opportunity of studying factory conditions in that country. It was originally intended that my inquiry should be confined to the effect of modern industry on women. I found, however, that it was not possible to secure sufficient exact information to give completeness to a sectional study, and also that in most cases the conditions which demanded attention concerned men and women alike. I have therefore attempted to open up a wider subject, to note special dangers, and to suggest openings for advance.

One of the problems of agricultural life in certain districts of India is the fragmentation of holdings. A diagram of such isolated plots of land scattered round a village rises in my mind as a picture of this book, and my hope is that, fragmentary as the study is, it may inspire others to work out from the individual sections until the whole area is overtaken. The hope recalls the familiar saying of the farmer who was sure he would be content if he possessed all the fields that adjoined his own land.

The questions that have been raised are of world-wide significance. The new atmosphere of thought in which men and women, to-day, in widely separated countries, are working for better social and international relationships is the justification for re-examining problems that have hitherto been considered insoluble; and the reason for attacking these problems with hopefulness is that through the fulfilment of the new demands for world-wide co-operation the highest religious aspirations of mankind



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will find ever fuller expression, the demands themselves being the outcome of a clearer understanding of the spirit and teaching of Jesus Christ.

It is a pleasure to have this opportunity of expressing my sincere gratitude to the Council of the Selly Oak Colleges for the Research Fellowship which set me free for this study, and very specially to Mr. Edward Cadbury, through whose generosity the Fellowship was founded.

I wish also to acknowledge my great indebtedness to Principal and Mrs. McKenzie of Wilson College, Bombay, through whose forethought and kindness I was brought into immediate touch with industrial conditions there and in other parts of India; to Professor J. C. Kydd of the Selly Oak Colleges who, first in Calcutta and later in England, has given most valuable assistance, and has in my absence carried the proof through the final stages of the Press; and to all those, Indian, American, and British, who, by their interest, their criticism and their practical help, have made the writing of this book possible.

JANET HARVEY KELMAN.

LAKE GEORGE, NEW YORK STATE,  
*August 1923.*





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# LABOUR IN INDIA

## CHAPTER I

### INTRODUCTION

INDIA is passing through a time of strain, and it is inevitable that attention should centre on the more obvious causes of unrest. While this is so, changes that will have great influence on her future are going on almost unnoticed. Mining areas are being enlarged and new mills are being built. The congestion of thousands of workers in limited areas is increasing. Many who are alive to the urgency of agricultural and village problems have not realized that in certain localities the industrial development is one side, and not an unimportant side, of the village problem as that exists to-day. Since the meetings of the Washington Labour Conference in 1919, Indian Labour has been definitely linked up with International Labour. Not only within the boundaries of Hindustan, but throughout the world, its influence will be felt. Through the gates of modern industry, pioneer groups of outcastes, finding their way to emancipation, take their first steps on the path to self-respect and independence, and their eventual influence on the future of India will be coloured by their experiences on the journey.

India shares with other countries the economic difficulties that arise with industrialism. There are also, for her, special problems associated with factory life because of her social customs and her climate. Further perplexities arise because of the wide-spread belief that all industrial problems would be easy to solve were Indian





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Home Rule an established fact. "Once Self-Government is attained, there will be prosperity enough for all, but not till then,"<sup>\*</sup> is not an isolated expression of belief. For while a considerable strength of opinion amongst Nationalists is ranged against modern developments, and would fain see India once again a land of agriculture and village industry, a very powerful propaganda is at work to secure for her a foremost place in the world's markets.

There is no cause for wonder that a nation with a great past, reawakening to new possibilities for the future, should be moved by an intense desire to gain supremacy, whether that supremacy be along the lines of the spiritual conquest of the world, or of commerce and a leading place in industrial matters, in coming years. But such a desire is a serious development at a time when ideals of world-wide comity and mutual co-operation are striving to make themselves felt and understood, and when there has arisen the hope of securing better international relationships which shall minimize the elements in commerce that tend to separate the peoples of one nation from those of others, and shall lay the foundations of lasting peace. The demand that India should have a free and equal place amongst the commercial nations of the world is apt to give place to the demand that India shall lead the nations as she did of old, when she was the centre of commerce for the East and when her manufactures were the choicest merchandise in the markets of the West. But it is possible that the years will prove to future generations of Indians and English alike that the effort for world supremacy in industrial matters is in direct opposition to progress in the conditions of labour, and must for that reason eventually defeat its own aims.

If it be admitted that the conditions of industrial workers in India attract little attention, it must further be realized that those conditions that affect women workers have still less hold on public thought. To many in the West, the mere coupling of "Indian women" and "modern

<sup>\*</sup> Reported from the Presidential Speech of Mr. Dadabhai Naorji at the National Congress of 1906.



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industry" is startling. If thought is turned in that direction it falters because there is so little in experience to which it can attach itself. Books, and conversation with those who have some knowledge of India can open the mind to many sides of the life and thought of that great continent. But the particular subject of this study has no place in literature, and cannot embody itself in imagination.

Some knowledge of women's place in modern European mills and factories, and a floating picture of graceful figures in brilliantly coloured saris, with a sense of the incongruous in trying to fit factory stringency into the leisurely life of an Eastern people, and an effort to imagine the mutual reaction of age-long custom on mechanical device, are all that even an interested traveller carries on board. But as such a voyager looks back to blocks of mills, to crowded dwellings, to bazars, the picture which had not even outlines is filled in magically. For that which had no existence in the mind has become a living entity. India's labouring people have laid hold of the imagination. But they have done more than that. They have escaped from the separating adjective and are just "people."

It is true that there are distinctive features, and that these features must be understood and reckoned with in any effort to understand problems and possibilities as they appear in the great industrial centres; but the fact borne in on the imagination is that the questions raised are world questions, and that those who are implicated in the solving of them, or who suffer for their non-solution, are living, breathing individuals, possessors of personality, with capacity to bring to the future real contributions that no others of the world's citizens may bring.

It is not easy to convey any sense of the pull on heart and conscience of the great crowds of inarticulate India, nor to express the double consciousness that arises, of the mass on the one hand and on the other of the personalities of those who compose it. For in city and in village alike, possibilities of direct human relationship, across barriers of race and language, constantly occur.





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A trifling accident, an unexpected happening, the gesture of a child, a touch of humour, are of the things that unite, and then that secret breath of comradeship, than which in its fullness there is no more gracious gift in life, mingles for a moment the alien races.

In spite of the ignorance that prevails widely with regard to the conditions of women's labour in India, a real public interest has been aroused. This has been evident for a long time, but it has become much more conscious since the publication of the Conventions of the Washington Conference and the consequent discussions with regard to the extent to which these can be applied to Indian conditions. Outstanding instances of Welfare Work, Medical Research and the rising of Trade Union Organization have each helped to spread the interest. Public opinion as yet, however, has not the means for coming to an accurate knowledge of the facts. In a country like England, where much has been written about Labour, it is possible to count on a background of knowledge, and in writing of a single group of workers to deal almost entirely with the circumstances peculiar to them. This directness is impossible in the present instance. Though the special subject of inquiry is the conditions and surroundings of Indian women in textile mills, the survey must be broader, and must include, at least in outline, some indication of labour conditions generally. The woman cannot be separated from the man. Only quite recently, and still only to a very small extent, have women begun to work in groups apart from their men-folk. And the circumstances of mill-workers cannot be treated without reference to those of other workers, and to problems that are common to other types of work.

The fact that the entrance of women into factories in India is of recent date and is still on a very small scale, when the whole mass of the population is considered, makes it easier than it would otherwise be to judge what factory life means to an Indian woman. Her sisters who are not, so far as their work is concerned, affected by modern conditions can be found all over India, and



their lives and surroundings can be compared with those of the factory labourers.

It is impossible to be in India just now without being forcibly brought up against the political situation, on the one hand, and against the unfairness of the present way of working the industrial system, on the other. Varying points of view on both these subjects affect the progress of the Indian labourer and may have to be cited. But it simplifies matters greatly to know that, in the main, the subject of this book can be considered apart from theories on politics or on the industrial system. What answers the years will bring to the many questions of world-wide import that are agitating intellectual life to-day it were vain to conjecture; but whatever these answers may be, the conditions in which women are working in the mills of India have an interest of their own. There are wide divisions of thought about what must happen to industrialism, or in spite of it, before rational relationships between the different members of communities can be established and maintained; but there are demands in which all serious-minded men and women can unite, and in order to know how these may be met, it is necessary to learn as much as possible of what the actual conditions are. The working out of modifications of these conditions will affect the world, whatever change of spirit or change of form leads the industrial enterprise of the world on to higher planes. And whatever relationship may eventually exist between India and Britain, or between India and other nations, all countries will gain by every better standard accepted and by each growing avenue of sympathy.

Before going on to consider conditions in detail, it will probably be wise to try to find a standard by which these conditions may fairly be judged, and with regard to which suggestions may be made. It would obviously be unjust to judge by abstract ideals, or to measure eastern conditions by western. Two things, however, may be claimed. One of these is that there are certain things in the relations between man and man that are definitely anti-social; that are a discredit to the human





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face, and that, wherever they exist and are tolerated complacently, do definitely retard the progress, not only of those who suffer from them, and of those who tolerate them or benefit materially or socially from them, but also, indirectly, of the peoples of the whole world. The other is, that any fresh influence consciously brought to bear on a community or on a nation involves responsibility on the part of those who introduce it. That responsibility involves the duty of securing that the community or the nation is not injured or degraded by the new influence. Further, it may fairly be demanded that if the new activity brings gain in any form to the introducers, it is only fair that a proportionate gain should accrue to those through whom the bringers of the new elements have secured their profit.

There is a fashion of speaking of the industrial advance of a country as if it consisted in production and export. "It is almost forgotten that the object of development is the welfare of a certain race or community of human beings."<sup>1</sup> For India, as for all other nations, the demand for gradual development towards full human life must be made for all sections of the community. If such opportunity is to be open to all, then economic changes, however inevitable, must not be suffered to advance the interests of the few at the cost of the many; nor even of the many at the cost of definite groups, whether that cost is experienced in moral, mental, or physical loss. This may seem a counsel of perfection remote from the way in which life is lived to-day. It is an aim, and it may be necessary to admit that it is a far-off aim. But it is a commanding aim if the race is to maintain its human stature. The idea of a world-society co-operating for good and possessing the future has dawned on this generation as on no previous one, and the responsibility of working for it cannot be repudiated without dishonour.

<sup>1</sup> "The Art of Economic Development," by H. Stanley Jevons, University Professor of Economics, Allahabad, *Indian Journal of Economics*, vol. iii, part iii, p. 310.



## CHAPTER II

### CIVILIZATION AND POVERTY

It would be interesting to prefix to this study an examination of the state of society in Britain when the Industrial Revolution took place. To do so would encroach too much on the space available, and would place between the reader and the real subject of this essay a lengthy yet inadequate account of much that could be gathered elsewhere. There are two outstanding differences between the British and the Indian situation. The type of civilization into which modern industrialism forced itself in the east is entirely unlike that of the west; and the deliberateness of the spread of production by mechanical power in India, and the narrowness of the areas that it has affected in that country, are in marked contrast to the suddenness of its intrusion and the width of its scope in the west, especially in Britain.

If the burden of filling in the contrasting picture is left to the reader, it is still desirable to attempt to give some idea of the civilization (on its social and economic side, and as far as it affects conditions of labour) into which modern industrial methods penetrated in India, and which still exists over vast areas of that country scarcely affected by machinery or by modern ideas of finance; and to touch on the history of the coming of machinery to the city centres there.

The civilization to which reference is made includes every stratum of society. There are no groups of the population within which it is nobody else's business what the individuals do. Each life is regulated by rules that have been kept for thousands of years, and that demand detailed obedience from outcaste and from Brahman.





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It is true that these customs change unobtrusively and become modified, so that it is impossible to lay down hard and fast rules and to say that this is always so or that that never varies. But even when all allowance is made for such gradual modifications there remains the fact that every change in life and occupation must take knowledge of, make room for, and be influenced by, the rules of an ancient and complicated civilization.

Opportunities of seeing Indian life in intimacy and in detail make the inner force of this civilization abundantly apparent; but even the fleeting glance of the new-comer in any of the great ports of arrival may catch superficial evidence of it. The varying robes, each with its note of significance, reminding one of an endless chain of links with the far past; the dignity of carriage of men and women of varying ranks, and their lack of self-consciousness; the ease with which the children slip into postures familiar to the stranger only in the images of the gods; the fearless wandering of the cattle through the streets unmolested by young or old—these and many other signs tell of the long corporate history of the peoples of India. So spontaneous do these outward signs of controlled life seem to be that there is no appearance of conscious voluntary co-operation. If it is the case that the growth of conscious co-operation has been discouraged by the want of a felt need for it in such a fully regulated scheme of life, this fact may prove a clue to some of the difficulties that will have to be overcome before a healthy social life in new conditions can be secured.

This ancient civilization has in it no place for the huge modern industrial concern. Economically it is based on agriculture, and on home, or small collective, industries, and its heads are the Zamindar, the small merchant, and the moneylender. Its exchange values are arranged by custom and by bargain, and in many districts payment is still made in grain or in service. Unacknowledged commission is deducted at every opportunity, and indebtedness is so general a condition amongst the poorer inhabitants that there are areas of which it can be said



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that no one is free from the clutches of the moneylender except those who themselves lend money.

There is scarcely a feature of the civilization of India that is not undergoing change and modification at the present time, so that it is difficult to make general statements. Even where there is no rapid change, outstanding characteristics have varied, and do vary greatly, in different parts of the continent, and amongst different sections of the varying communities. At the same time a certain knowledge of a background is necessary.

The joint-family system is characteristic of the majority of Indian homes. To this there are probably fewer exceptions amongst the labouring folk<sup>1</sup> than amongst the educated and wealthy. Under this system the family group consists of all the descendants in the male line from a common ancestor, with their wives and their unmarried daughters, and may include seventy or eighty people, even in India, where the average lifetime is only about twenty-three years. The head of this community bears the responsibility for the support of the whole number, and has authority over all. This authority, though not technically shared by his wife, is often vested in her and wielded by her. The head of the family is not necessarily the oldest living representative. The latter may have retired and handed over his authority to his son or brother, for in the Hindu plan of life a man is free at an early age to give up worldly responsibilities and retire, first to leisure, and then, if he will, to a life of religious devotion.

To a great extent property is a family possession, and though, as is the case in some places, the head may have power over its disposal during his lifetime, he has usually no power to will it away from the family nor to prevent its division amongst the different members at his death or retirement if partition is the custom of the locality.<sup>2</sup>

The working members of the family thus shoulder

<sup>1</sup> Other than outcastes.

<sup>2</sup> See *A Study of Indian Economics*, by Pramathanath Banerjea, D.Sc., p. 40.





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the burden of the support of the sick and feeble. The pressure that is brought to bear on those reluctant to work comes from the family group to which they belong, and, though there may be injustices and inequalities of treatment, the member of such a community, as long as he does not depart from its customary demands, is sure of shelter and food. In the labouring-class family there is not the same likelihood that large numbers of able-bodied dependents will gather round the verandah and attempt to share the income without contributing labour, as there is under the same system in wealthier groups of society, where the number of a man's dependents may be almost a matter of congratulation as a sign of his wealth.

But there are very real, practical difficulties associated with the system. The family lands may not be large enough to employ the whole group. The family trade may be wholly met in the given locality by those already occupied in it, and the family system retards, where it does not actually prevent, the younger members' search for work elsewhere. When such a family group has begun to feel financial difficulties, or has only just managed to meet its obligations, debts incurred for social and religious ceremonies, especially for the marriages of its daughters, involve permanent impoverishment. The imperative demands created by periods of scarcity, when prices rise suddenly and ruin stares the cultivator in the face, lead to increased indebtedness. In times of still more acute crisis, when continued failure of monsoon rains or pressure by the moneylender leaves the head of the family without resource, the whole community may be broken up and each unit may be driven from the shelter of the homestead to beg, or to seek for work as a coolie. The system having tended, even in prosperous days, to discourage independence and initiative, leaves its members singularly helpless.

The typical home occupied by a prosperous family group is built round a court. Business is carried on and much of the public life is lived in an outer verandah and in the rooms which open on to it. The women's apart-



ments, the room which is kitchen,<sup>1</sup> dining-room, and chapel, the storerooms and other private rooms, open on to an inner verandah which surrounds the central enclosure. To this enclosure, in many cases, the family goat and the oxen return for the night. Sometimes a passage, cut through one side of the building, leads to another similar court also surrounded with rooms. At other times the enlargement required to meet the needs of the growing community is secured by the addition of rooms to the main building. The plan of construction round a central court is so much approved that it is often followed even when the space available for the enclosure is too small to admit the entrance of more than a few rays of sunshine at midday.

But millions of India's poorer families cannot have such elaborate dwellings. Erections, ten feet by ten feet, with a verandah, abound everywhere, and can take on the most bewilderingly different appearances from outside. Within there is a great sameness. There is a mud floor, solid and usually clean except during the rains. It is scrubbed with a mixture of mud, water, and cow-dung, which produces a glossy surface. The fireplace, if inside the hut, is in one corner, the bathing-place in another. Sometimes the interior is lighted up by the gleam of a brass tray or of a copper dekshi,<sup>2</sup> but in poorer huts the vessels are of earthenware.<sup>3</sup> If the household has blankets or garments not in constant use, these hang from the rafters or from pegs in the wall. On the verandah and in the compound there are almost sure to be country bedsteads, known as charpoys, standing on end or set ready for use as tables, cupboards, or seats. The charpoy consists of a rough oblong frame on four short stout legs. Cord <sup>4</sup> is interlaced from side to side and from end to end of the frame, and that is all.

<sup>1</sup> In certain localities, and in very many small houses, the fireplace is built in the open, either against an outer wall or at a little distance. In other cases a small cook-house is erected near the house.

<sup>2</sup> Cooking-pot.

<sup>3</sup> Village potters secure a wonderful polish on their rough, black vessels. The surface of red pots and jars is frequently dull.

<sup>4</sup> There are many varieties of charpoy. Some are firmly put together and interlaced with broad upholsterers' tape instead of cord.





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But if the interior of one of these innumerable huts is like that of any other, the outside varies greatly. In many cases the walls are of mud a foot thick, supported by a slight framework of bamboo posts, and the dwelling is completed by a flat roof of mud or by a sloping one of thatch. The walls of others are composed of palm leaves interlaced on a bamboo framework and daubed over with mud. In those of the latter type the roofs are of thatch, and slope at varying angles. In almost every instance the roof is carried out beyond the walls and shelters a verandah. Often huts are built with no apparent relation to each other or to anything else. They are found fitted into the oddest angles of ground with scarcely a passage-way left open. A banana plant or some heads of maize, a few sturdy marigolds or a scraggy jasmine<sup>1</sup> shrub may occasionally grow close to a dwelling, but a laid-out plot of garden ground is uncommon in many parts of India. The frequent sweepings from the hut are often allowed to lie immediately beyond the threshold, or to blow back into the interior. Not far away the sacred basil or tulsi, grown in the hollowed cornice of a short pillar, is frequently seen. The little shrub is often quite withered, but the wrinkled leaves may hold the same virtue in the mourner's mind as fresh ones would when laid on the tongue of the dead.

There are countless dwellings of still greater simplicity. Amongst these are the broken-down huts of the outcastes, and the rude shelters built by wandering tribes for temporary residence. Some of these require only bundles of reeds leaning against each other as in a shock of corn, with more bundles closing up one end and a rough curtain of sacking across the entrance.

The family group is part of a larger community or "caste." The belief is held by many that the origin of the primary caste distinctions can be found in the social organization formed by the early Indo-Aryan invaders

<sup>1</sup> White sweet-scented jasmine grows freely throughout India. Its flowers, strung blossom by blossom, frequently form the continuous chain in the long garlands that are prepared for guests. Pink roses interposed at intervals, and wisps of silver tinsel complete some of the simpler and more beautiful forms of this decoration.



India, by which the invading community was broken up into the three main divisions : of Brahmans, who were priests, Kshatriyas or Rajanyas, who were rulers and soldiers, Vaisyas, who were men of the people, agriculturalists, artisans, and merchants. Those of the aboriginal inhabitants of the land who accepted the rule of the Aryans formed the fourth caste of Sudras or servants.<sup>1</sup> Other early inhabitants not included among the Sudras were the ancestors of the greater number of the untouchables, who are still outside of caste. Education and the religion of the Vedas were the prerogatives of the invaders, that is of the first three, or twice-born castes, alone. In order to keep these divisions clear, and to maintain the dignity and purity of the higher groups, strict rules forbidding intermarriage and interdining were formulated.

The fact that the broad divisions corresponded to occupations has given to the caste system a control over the lives of its members that enters into and dominates business relationships, trade customs, and professional obligations. This is true to so great an extent that this side of caste gives opportunity for valuable research to those interested in trade guilds.<sup>2</sup>

But the study of the foregoing aspects of caste would do little to give an impression of its influence in India to-day. The details of the social organization which it conserves are sanctioned by religion. The four main divisions keep their stations because of the belief that they sprang symbolically from the mouth, the arms, the thighs, and the feet of the Divine Source of the universe.<sup>3</sup>

The strength of the hold of caste rules on the public mind is reinforced by the doctrine of Karma, which seeks to vindicate the justice of the universe by maintaining that an "unending procession of unnumbered souls,"

<sup>1</sup> It is suggested in a note on p. 35 of *A Study of Indian Economics*, by P. Banerjea, D.Sc., that "the less cultured among the Aryans, together with the conquered tribes, formed the Sudra caste."

<sup>2</sup> *A Study of Indian Economics*, by P. Banerjea, D.Sc., pp. 37 f.

<sup>3</sup> "The Brahman was his mouth; the Rajanya was made from his arms; the being called Vaisya, he was his thighs; the Sudra sprang from his feet" (Rigveda x. xc. 12). See *The Crown of Hinduism*, by J. N. Farquhar, p. 159.





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emanations of the divine spirit," "sparks from the central fire," "drops from the ocean of divinity," pass ceaselessly through plants, men, gods, demons, animals, in each life reaping the gains of the good deeds of a past life, paying the penalties of previous evil actions, and acquiring new merit and demerit.

There is no end to this restless series of transmigrations. The process of retribution is so exhausting that the world goes through three stages of increasing degeneration from the first age of full virtue. At the close of this decline comes a formless period, during which souls rest free from embodiment until the time comes for a new manifestation. With the opening of this new age of virtue the castes are formed once more, and the ancient hymns are again revealed to holy men.

Release from this endless wheel of conscious being can be gained by a few choice souls, and the search for such release has been the age-long passion of India's saints. But for the vast masses no such release is possible. In the realm of Karma there is no progress nor purpose in the life of the race, nor can there be. The deeds that create merit consist to a large extent in obedience to caste rules and ceremonial rites. These have so thoroughly summed up duty in the consciousness of many that there is no latent sense of injustice. So impossible to predict are the workings of Karma to those who have no memory of earlier lives with their chain of deeds, that deep fatalism characterizes the Hindu outlook on life.

Traces of caste are found in literature which dates from 500 B.C., but its form had not solidified into a hard-and-fast framework until the beginning of the present era. As early as 200 B.C. the four original divisions had broken up into many sub-divisions, and to-day there are more than two thousand main castes and tribes, and at least three thousand sub-divisions. The Brahmans number some fifteen millions, and the outcastes fifty millions.

Each of these groups has its own more or less elaborate code of regulations for life: its ritual for birth and for death, and for the detailed conduct of daily life. Under



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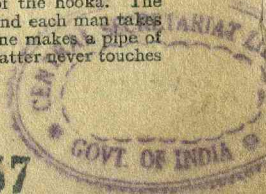
these conditions the preparing of the daily meals is a serious and taxing work in the Hindu home. Even though the food may be very poor and may have little nourishment in it, the various processes of preparation must be carried out with minute care. The customs with regard to drinking are as stringent. A careful Indian may catch in his hands the water from a spout or from a brass vessel, or he may put his lips to the stream as it falls, but in neither case do his lips touch vessel or spout.<sup>1</sup> But his own precaution alone does not satisfy him. He must be sure that the water itself has not been contaminated by contact with one of a lower caste. He would die of thirst rather than drink from the well of outcastes. The daily bath, taken by pouring water from a lota over head and body on the shallow bank of a river or tank or by the village well, and the daily washing of wearing apparel, are also governed by caste rules; but many such regulations are not binding on the lower castes, and in some cases are forbidden to outcastes.

For the lesser infringements of caste fines are levied; and these, along with various customary payments on mortgages and on sales of houses, or at the time of marriage, go to swell the funds from which relief is given to caste families in distress, and to beggars and holy men.

Theoretically all Muslims are equal, but in India the idea of caste has influenced their organization. A Muslim of Arab, Persian, Afghan, or Moghul origin maintains to the rank and file a similar attitude to that which the twice-born Aryan bears to the masses of Sudras and outcastes. In many parts restrictions are placed on inter-marriage, and occupational groups are organized on the model of regular castes within which boycotting of refractory members is enforced by councils and officials.

There are other characteristics of Indian civilization

<sup>1</sup> In a similar way the lips never touch the mouth of the hooka. The end of the long pipe is passed round the social circle and each man takes a few whiffs and passes it on; but in doing so each one makes a pipe of the hand that holds the hooka, so that the end of the latter never touches his lips.



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that must be considered in order to understand the atmosphere and surroundings into which modern industry has come. Of great importance is the relation of the people to their land. There was no unattached population ready to be gathered into the mills when the gates of the latter opened to it. The great majority of mill-workers come from the agricultural classes. The land, its method of division, its power to maintain the dwellers on it, its renovation or deterioration, are factors in the industrial problem of India to-day. Even those who toil as serfs, and the groups of outcastes whose huts may be seen just outside the village precincts, are often deeply attached to the place of their birth. The agricultural population lives for the most part in villages, and a village community includes not only the owners and the cultivators of the neighbouring fields, but also a group of artisans and a headman, an accountant, a watchman, a moneylender, and possibly a schoolmaster. The history of the recent efforts to develop and revivify the system of village government is full of interest.<sup>1</sup>

In Malabar, and in the Kanara districts to the north of it, where the land is fertile and where inlets from the ocean and frequent rivers and ravines break up the country, the cultivators live in isolated homesteads. Groves of coco-nut palms surround wide fields of rice, which, when harvest is approaching, seem like irregular lakes of green with bays and inlets penetrating into the solid forest. Here and there in the sea of green rise islands bearing a few palm-trees, a group of banana stems, and the buildings of a farm. Other homesteads are partially hid by the palm stems, but the familiar picture of the compact village is nowhere to be seen.<sup>2</sup> But throughout the greater part of India the landscape is broken by a countless succession of villages, often, in the dry season, scarcely discernible from the surrounding country till one is close to them, often marked out at a greater distance by the group of trees beside which the houses nestle.

<sup>1</sup> See *Village Government in British India*, by John Matthai.

<sup>2</sup> For other districts in India where the population is scattered, see *Village Government in British India*, by John Matthai, p. 8; and *The Indian Village Community*, by Sir R. S. Baden-Powell, pp. 57, 62, 64.



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The systems of land-holding differ very widely throughout the continent. Matthai draws attention to two main types. These are the landlord type, as found in the Punjab, in the United Provinces, and in certain parts of the Central Provinces; and the non-landlord type more commonly found in the Presidencies of Madras and Bombay. In the typical village of the former order a group of proprietors hold the area covered by the village dwellings, by the surrounding fields, and by the waste land attached to these. All the other inhabitants pay rent to them, and the land-holding group are responsible for the revenue from the village as a whole.

In the areas of the other type each cultivator holds his own land and pays the tax on it directly to the State. It is in the districts in which the latter arrangement, or one similar to it, is in operation that the village community, with its elected headman, was most fully developed in former days, and can still be seen exercising many communal functions.

In India the "holy man" is always a poor man, wearing the outward signs of poverty, and content to depend on the gifts of others; but this does not create a general desire for poverty even amongst the devout. The poverty of millions of the labouring folk in India is not the result of choice, nor of idealism, but of hard, daily necessity. A sea of controversy rages round the discussion of the main causes of this poverty, and round the question whether it is increasing or decreasing; but no one denies its existence. The effect of the trading methods of the East India Company and of the modern industrial revolution on the scattered industries of the land will be referred to later. Other alleged causes are beyond the scope of this study.

There is at least one cause of poverty that tends to hasten the development of modern industrialism. It is the difficulty that is found in many areas in procuring by agriculture the necessary support for the increasing population. Here, again, many different opinions are held. There are those who maintain that the land would be more than able to support its inhabitants if better agricul-





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tural methods were employed, and if all the cultivable waste land were brought in. Others hold that if a more reasonable proportion of the fruits of the country went to the cultivators, the difficulty would be obviated. Others again, who have given much thought to the question, maintain that no improvement of landlords, and no advance in methods, can make it possible for the increasing population of such a vast continent as India to find its support from agriculture. It would be an interesting study to gather as many instances as possible of these three attitudes and to find out whether the varying points of view depend entirely or chiefly on the locality that has been investigated, or whether it could be proved that in definite cases different workers have come to opposite opinions with regard to the possible fertility of the same province or neighbourhood.<sup>1</sup>

There seems to be no doubt that the relation of the cultivators to the land, and their dependence on it, is one great cause of poverty. There are fruitful areas in which the cultivator may count on getting two or even three crops in a year, but there are great stretches of country where the land is infertile. In many districts each holding has been divided out amongst the representatives of a family again and again, as one generation after another took possession, till fieldlets of diminutive size and quaintly shaped outline are scattered all over the neighbourhood.<sup>2</sup> The evil effects of this continual subdivision<sup>3</sup> are to some extent counteracted by the family system which carries with it a sense of joint responsibility. The fields are worked by the members of

<sup>1</sup> See *The Economic Life of a Bengal District*, by J. C. Jack, I.C.S., R.F.A.; *Land and Labour in a Deccan Village*, by Harold H. Mann, D.Sc.; *Land and Labour in a Deccan Village*, Study No. 2, by Harold H. Mann, D.Sc., and N. V. Kanitkar, B.Sc., L.Ag., and "Size of Land Holdings in the Bombay Presidency," by The Hon. Mr. G. F. Keatinge, C.I.E., I.C.S., *Indian Journal of Economics*, vol. ii, part ii, p. 180.

<sup>2</sup> See *Land and Labour in a Deccan Village*, Study No. 2, by Harold H. Mann, D.Sc., and N. V. Kanitkar, B.Sc., L.Ag., pp. 40-9; and "Size of Land Holdings in the Bombay Presidency," by The Hon. Mr. G. F. Keatinge, C.I.E., I.C.S., in the *Indian Journal of Economics*, vol. ii, p. 180.

<sup>3</sup> Besides subdivision there is frequently fragmentation of holdings in order that, where productivity varies, each heir may get a share of land of each quality. A long field may be divided into strips, some of which are not more than twenty-three feet wide.



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family in co-operation, and if they produce crops that will support the entire group, things go comparatively well. But there are wide areas in which the ground will not yield enough even in prosperous seasons for the sustenance of these large communities, and one of two things happens: either the family lives far below sound subsistence level and therefore dwindles, or else individuals, tired of the struggle, wander off to see if they can do better elsewhere.

Over these areas also, sometimes after a course of years of success, sometimes at intervals of two or three years, there comes the shadow of famine. To read of such things, or to see pictures of famine refugees, gives little idea of what even a slight famine entails. In order to have some faint realization of its meaning, it is necessary to see the district that is in its grip. In the cold season of 1920, large areas in the Deccan were threatened. Poona, the alternative seat of the Bombay Government, stands on the outskirts of one such area. The town has rivers, and its immediate neighbourhood was like a garden; but a short distance from it, roadside flowers and green crops ceased, and the land showed only patches of poor, short grain. The blades were burnt brown. For the most part no fruit had formed. If, amongst such remnants of hopelessly dried-up cereals, there appeared even a few dozen heads of grain, men and women were watching to scare off birds or cattle. Acre upon acre of burnt-up crops or barren ploughed fields in which, for want of a longed-for shower, it had never been possible to sow the seed, stretched on both sides of the track, like an endless sea-beach whose sands were unrelieved by wave or rock. This desert was broken at rare intervals by a green bank beside a muddy pool in the bed of a river otherwise as dry as the plains. Dotted over the area were clusters of huts which showed where the villages were. Herds of buffaloes, bullocks, and goats wandered over fields on which even burnt spikes were not distinguishable. This was in December. There might be rain in June. If good rains came then prices would fall in November. At that time there were no very marked signs of want





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on the cattle, nor on the people who gathered to the stations; but the unalterable course of the next eight months was written over great stretches of the land from horizon to horizon. Men and women were already trekking to the cities.

The incidence of famine makes the need for the use of the best methods of agriculture in the intervening years most urgent, but in the way of any general improvement there are many difficulties which must be realized and met. Failure to adopt modern methods is not due only to conservatism on the part of the cultivators. In many localities no one innovation can come without a group of others. A modern plough is no gain in a district where the supplies of water and of manure are very limited, because turning up a deeper layer of soil will only absorb more of these and will give a poorer yield accordingly. The introduction of new methods will have to come gradually and with co-operation. There are immense resources available. Even in areas extensively cultivated much land is still unused or only partially used, but in order to take full advantage of these regions and to secure the benefits of more modern methods, there must be joint action and gradual education.

There are also large districts where the land has never been brought under cultivation. Efforts have been made to encourage colonization in Indian States,<sup>1</sup> but many difficulties surround these experiments in districts in which adequate irrigation has not previously been introduced.<sup>2</sup> The colonists are apt to grow discouraged and to drift back to their former homes, before any considerable progress has been secured. Though the land may have been unclaimed when the immigrants reached it, rumours of "vague grazing rights of neighbouring villages which may be several miles away" trouble them. Their animals are stolen and their crops destroyed, and sometimes

<sup>1</sup> See "The Art of Economic Development," by H. Stanley Jevons, *Indian Journal of Economics*, vol. iii, part iii, p. 310.

<sup>2</sup> A graphic description of the change produced, not only in the fertility of the country, but also in the habits of the people in a newly irrigated region, is given in *The Awakening of India*, by J. Ramsay MacDonald, M.P., pp. 229 f.



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protection is refused to them unless heavy bribes are given.

There is another direction, however, in which progress can be more rapid. In many parts of the country, in which it would be impossible to introduce modern methods of agriculture suddenly, the crops can be improved in quality and in quantity by the sowing of selected seed. The improvement is often great, and it can be readily recognized by the cultivator if he has ordinary seasons in which to compare harvests. Some of the new varieties of rice yield, in weight, from two hundred and forty pounds to over five hundred pounds per acre more than could be grown from the seed that was formerly in use. An idea of the importance of research in connection with the cultivation of cotton can be gained from the fact that, in the Province of Bombay, the crops grown in one year from the seed of special plants reared at an experimental Government farm at Surat had an increased value of fifty thousand pounds sterling.<sup>1</sup> Many difficulties have still to be overcome. The crops are apt to deteriorate through the mixing of seeds and from other causes, but there is little doubt that continued and rapid advance will take place through the cultivation and distribution of selected strains.

Agricultural enterprises in India are further complicated by the fact that too many cattle are kept in proportion to the pasture-land available. In many districts the people will not kill any animal, with the result that there is a very low standard of quality amongst the cows, oxen, and goats, and that many of them are under-fed, and are, therefore, a prey to disease. The workers are so ignorant of the laws of health that, when disease appears, their inclination is to move to another place, taking infected cattle with them, and so spreading disaster.

Partly owing to custom and partly owing to desire to satisfy hunger with bulk, the food taken by the poorest inhabitants is often inadequate for physical energy, even

<sup>1</sup> *India in 1921*. A report prepared for presentation to Parliament in accordance with the requirements of the 26th Section of the Government of India Act, by Professor Rushbrook Williams, p. 156.





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where it is sufficient in amount ; and the large consumption of rice or millet without the addition of ghi,<sup>1</sup> milk, green vegetables, and fruit, has an injurious effect upon health. Here poverty is both cause and result.

Litigation is also a cause of poverty. There is a great delight in scoring points, and it is partly this delight (which is seen in methods of bargaining also) that makes the court such a haunt of the Indian. In referring to taxation in the district of Faridpur, Mr. Jack<sup>2</sup> draws attention to the large amount of revenue drawn from stamps, and notes that "four-fifths of this sum was collected in the shape of fees upon documents used in the law courts."

The ordinary life of the village is uneventful, and there is little to mark one day from another except at times of religious or family festivities. At such seasons the population takes holiday from its ordinary occupations, but is active and busy with a vivacity that is not to be seen in the ordinary daily work. The sums of money spent on marriages are sometimes so great as to impoverish a family for the lifetime of a generation. This custom is in operation throughout the community, and is prevalent amongst Hindus and Mohammedans and amongst wealthy and poor alike. Half a year's income or even a whole year's income will go on a marriage feast lasting for two or three days, and is spent, to a certain extent, on entertaining guests. An element of rivalry is shown in the attempt to make a greater display than was made at the last marriage in the village. But the dowry expected with the bride is probably the most exacting expenditure of the occasion. Groups of young men, eager for reform in this and in other directions, are binding themselves not to ask for dowry with their brides, but though that feeling is present and many men wish to change the custom, the latter is so prevalent that no father likes to be one of the first to refrain from the marriage gift. In a well-known family in Calcutta the young bride was so moved at the thought of the deprivations her family would suffer owing to the cost of her marriage that she

<sup>1</sup> Melted butter.

<sup>2</sup> *The Economic Life of a Bengal District*, by J. C. Jack, I.C.S., p. 115.



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committed suicide, leaving a note behind with the message that though life was ended for her, she rejoiced that her family would be free.

The fact of the poverty of the people may be acknowledged while there is yet no realization of its extent, nor of the barrier it constitutes to progress. It is a serious menace to a country to have among its inhabitants great companies of beggars of countless types, pervading its streets, thronging its shrines, and lingering by its waysides. But the problems that arise in connection with mendicancy are small in comparison with those that must be faced when attention is turned to the vast numbers of workers who, during several months of each year, do not get enough food to satisfy hunger, and to the still larger communities whose members, though seldom conscious of starvation, yet do not get the supply of nourishment necessary for physical health and vigour.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> "Taking an average of all the seven years [1911-12 to 1917-18], it will be seen that 64.6 per cent. of the population lives always on insufficient food, getting only about 73 per cent. of the minimum requirement for maintaining efficiency."—"A Study of the Indian Food Problem," by Daya Shankar Dubey, M.A., F.E.S., *Indian Journal of Economics*, vol. iii, part ii, p. 180. See below, p. 115, note.





## CHAPTER III

## ASPECTS OF VILLAGE LIFE

THE majority of mill workers in departments other than weaving<sup>1</sup> are drawn from those who previously belonged to the agricultural classes. Some idea of the conditions of the latter will help to explain what entering the mill precincts involves for the worker.

In the districts in India where, either through a plentiful and regular rainfall, or through the presence of rivers, or of elaborate irrigation works, there is an assured supply of water, good crops may be counted on twice a year. In the United Provinces,<sup>2</sup> for instance, winter crops of wheat, barley, oats, lentils, peas, potatoes, and mustard are reaped in March and April, while the harvest of summer crops of rice, maize, millets, and oil-seeds ripens in October.<sup>3</sup> The winter crop needs constant artificial irrigation. The only months unoccupied by field work of one kind or another are May and June; and as these are months of great heat, any labour the cultivator feels inclined to do will be expended on repairs.

But throughout great tracts of country, the agricultural work of the year, instead of being spread over ten months, is possible for eight, six, or four months only. In such areas, after the crops are reaped, the ground, as far as the eye can reach, appears to be an unbroken waste of arid sand until the next rainfall gives the signal for sowing crops which will ripen with extraordinary rapidity should

<sup>1</sup> Weavers are drawn in large numbers from the Muslim hand-weaving community.

<sup>2</sup> See *The Silent India*, by Lieut-Col. S. J. Thomson, C.I.E., I.M.S.

<sup>3</sup> Dates vary from place to place. In Coimbatore the rice harvest was in progress in January.



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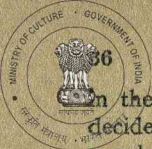
weather be favourable. Through these dry wastes, bullocks, buffaloes, and goats roam at their pleasure.

When the rains come, ploughing, sowing, and irrigation call all hands to work, and just then the animals, free to roam at pleasure during the parched season of the year, require constant and careful herding if the crops are to be kept safe. Watching of another kind is demanded later. Everywhere little perches are built high above the fields. They are slight erections of bamboo or of other stems which support a platform of thatch or matting and are of varying shapes, sometimes roofed or hooded, sometimes unprotected, but all emphasizing the constant watch that must be kept over the ripening crops. The cotton-growing areas show the same alternation of long seasons of leisure and short periods of heavy labour. Day by day, during the busy season, the cultivators scatter out from the villages to the surrounding fields in the early morning, if, indeed, they have not camped out all night. There are no regular hours of labour, and there is much free time.<sup>1</sup> The conditions of industrial work cannot be understood without a very thorough realization of the place of leisure in Indian life and of the value set on it. In country districts, where no field work can be done for six or eight months of the year, there are long hours of enforced inaction, but even where the demands of cultivation are much more strenuous there are many pauses in the day's work. It is true the day begins long before sunrise and does not end till darkness falls; but, besides the rest in the heat of the day, there are many shorter intervals and, oftener than not, one or another of a group of workers is seen standing aside discussing or looking on.

Coolies, who undertake heavy strains in carrying weights, seize any interval, and seem to be able to make up for the strenuousness of work by the power of absolute inaction during times of rest. How far the appreciation of leisure and of mere inactivity is the result of the climate, and how far it is the necessary condition of work for those with a low standard of living, especially

<sup>1</sup> See "Industrial Unrest in Bengal," by Rev. E. B. Sharpe, L.Th., *Church Missionary Review*, September 1921, p. 251.





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On the matter of food, are points that cannot be clearly decided, but it is a very real feature of the life of the people and must be taken into consideration in any constructive policy for raising standards.

The work of the village artisan necessitates no regular hours. If the village lies near a town, there will be days of busy activity before a festival, so that a large store of iron and brass cooking vessels, of earthenware pots, and of sweetmeats may be carried to the fair and displayed on the ground or in the booths, and there will be weekly preparation for the Friday bazar or Sunday bazar. If there is no special demand, working hours will vary with the passing mood.

Even in city industries, where old methods prevail, the working day is an irregular one. There is everywhere the feeling that work is done if necessity calls, and if there is no immediate call, it is done or not as the worker pleases—or if through timidity or debt he is in the power of some other as that other pleases. Usually there is much give-and-take. And when there is no immediate cause for haste, work will be broken by long talks, by wide margins of leisure at meal-times, and by the frequent exchange of greetings.

The trader, too, with his shop in the bazar shows the same indifference to time. He opens his shop when he pleases. He has endless patience for the uncertainty of the would-be customer, if he happens to be free and is not already giving a similarly endless patience to an earlier comer!

All through, the sensitiveness to the flight of time which machinery accentuates is absent. Nature may indeed at times demand hurried labour, but nature's demands are never those of the machine, regular and constant.

The occupation of the village woman includes cooking for the family, which is a fine art, and commences with the hard work of grinding grain or pounding rice. When that is done for the day, curry must be prepared, and this is always made afresh. There is no bottle of curry powder to simplify her task. Various herbs and other ingredients are used in different localities, and for different curries,



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and they are chopped and then rolled to a smooth paste on a slab by a roller like a scythe-stone. There is no separate food for the children. As soon as anything other than milk or rice-water is given to them, they share the ordinary meals, the vegetable curries, the rice or millet, and the lentils.

During certain morning and evening hours the village well is avoided by the men, and the women gather there for the many pitchers of water needed for cooking, washing, and drinking, and sometimes for their own daily bath if no river or tank is near. They carry the household water, and enjoy the talk and leisure by the well as each awaits her turn. There are ceremonial observances, too, which occupy part of her day, and now and again there are elaborate preparations for some coming festival, or, at very rare intervals, for a journey to a wedding or to a shrine.

The extent to which women of the agricultural classes take part in field work differs greatly in different localities. In some districts women are little seen out of doors, but throughout wide areas they go freely to the fields. They weed and take part in planting out, and in some places they reap. They cut and carry huge loads of grass and of tree branches for fodder and bedding.

In the Poona district women plant, cut, and bind sugarcane. In east Bengal again they only help in the fields in very busy seasons. In cotton-growing areas picking is done by women.<sup>1</sup> It is unusual to see women sowing. This may be because of the ceremonial significance of the act. But even in this matter there is no universal rule. In certain districts of the Central Provinces wheat sowing is normally done by the women. The man guides the plough, which is drawn by two bullocks. A bamboo, with a funnel at the upper end, is attached to the handle of the plough, and into this funnel the wife drops the seed, which finds its way through the bamboo tube, to fall into the newly made furrow. Women share the long, monotonous work of watching the crops. They are seen herding the cattle, and they milk the goats, cows, and buffaloes.

<sup>1</sup> See p. 62.





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When an agricultural village is found near a town a much wider range of activities opens up to the women. The market of Poona, for instance, draws villagers from the whole surrounding country. On an early morning the great open space in which it is held is an exhilarating scene. One very animated part is that in which the produce that has been brought into the town is sold by auction to the merchants, who will retail it either in the market or in the bazars. Here carts and bullocks, vegetables and people, are all packed into a small area, open to the rest of the market, but crowded because of the central attraction. Groups of coolie women stand round ready to carry the wholesale goods to stalls in the market. These women will get only a handful of fruit, fodder, or vegetables for their work, but they will find a sale for these handfuls later on, and will carry three or four annas<sup>1</sup> home with them when the morning's work is over. Other women carry the lighter loads into the market from the country round, getting an anna a journey for this. Many of them are dealers on their own account as well. These latter will have to pay rent for stalls in the market. For the fruit or vegetables sold at a stall for which the rent is two annas a woman will often make a rupee a day; she may even make two. Leaves for the feeding of goats and rough grass are gathered by the women and brought in huge loads strapped on to their backs and heads, and towering high above them. The onion trade here is entirely in the hands of the women; and the milk of cows and buffaloes is brought by them from the nearer villages, in great brass and copper vessels, with a wisp of grass stuffed into the mouth for lid. Poorer women gather cow dung from the roads, mix it with water, and make it into rough round cakes, which they spread out to dry on the ground, or plaster on to the walls of the dwelling-huts. When baked, these cakes are taken to the market to sell for fuel. Six annas is paid for one journey's load. An anna has to be deducted

<sup>1</sup> An anna is roughly equivalent to a penny. A rupee contains sixteen annas. Its exchange value fluctuates round one shilling and fourpence, in spite of efforts to fix it at two shillings



from a stall, but the rest is clear gain, as there has been no cost except of labour to the seller. These cakes of cow dung are the common fuel of the people, and the sight of walls plastered over with them, each with the impress of the spread-out hand that has set it there, is a very familiar one.

Markets vary much in different parts of the country, but everywhere there is the flash of bright, contrasting colours, and the eager, noisy bustle curiously intermingling with a sense of pervading leisure. Signs of more modern methods appear. Here and there are stalls, very popular, where the merchant has iron weights. His customers are not so dependent on the inspector who comes round to weigh, against a standard, the squarish dark stones that occupy the weight-scale of the less enterprising stall-holders.

Tribes that are neither town-dwellers nor cultivators frequent the markets. The members of one of the most interesting of these, that of the Wagris,<sup>1</sup> travel through the country for four of the dry months of the year as ironsmiths. Then they settle down on an open space in a town or in a city, some in lightly built temporary huts, some, literally, under their heavy carts. Into the latter they pile all their possessions. Then they throw a double supply of strong, shiny matting over the laden cart and attach the corners to poles fixed in the ground, marking out a larger area than that covered by the long, bulky vehicle. This makes a protecting roof. Under the body of the cart is a charpoy,<sup>2</sup> and under the shaft a hammock cradle. A tethered bullock completes the picture. When the matting is new, it keeps out the rain which slips down its shiny surface, but after the monsoon and subsequent exposure to sunshine, it becomes useless as a protection, so that it has to be replaced each year.

When the Wagris are settled thus in an encampment, they buy enamel dishes, sieves, brass pans, and pails and go to Hindu well-to-do streets, where the women

<sup>1</sup> Wagris work in mills in Ahmedabad during the time that their encampment is on the borders of the town.

<sup>2</sup> See p. 21.





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want household things for which they cannot pay in money. The Hindu ladies give old clothes, blankets, and shawls in return for the kitchen utensils. The Wagris will not take any money in this department of enterprise. When the garments are brought to their camp, men, women, and children gather on the ground to mend them in order that a good supply may be ready for the Friday bazar. At the market, the Wagris squat behind iron implements of varying kinds and beside piles of saris, quilts, and blankets (but with neither sieves nor enamel dishes) and carry on the money-making part of their business.

This leads on to the consideration of another group of customs. It is not only in matters of time and regularity that the Indian civilization is an unlikely preparation for industrial demands. The whole method and system of dealing with money is alien. There are still areas where agricultural payments are entirely, or largely, made in kind.<sup>1</sup> In less fertile areas a large proportion of the harvest of the village goes to the landlord and to one after another of a long list of village officials. The tenant cultivator himself retains scarcely enough for food and for seed, even in an average year, and no surplus to free himself from the demands of the moneylender to whom he has gone in years of drought. Not only has the rent to be paid and the interest on past loans, but here, already in the simplest kind of life, we find unacknowledged commission present. It is widely known as dasturi, and may be an extraordinary instrument of oppression. Until some understanding of the universality of this custom is reached, the stranger is constantly irritated and thrown out of gear. It needs a clear grasp, not only of the fact that this usage exists, but also of the force it wields, to become unastonished by the many and varied forms in which it appears, for it is not only usual to retain commission for oneself, it is also of the nature of things to draw in as many others as possible into the circle of

<sup>1</sup> See "Division of Crops on the Threshing Floor," by Jagaddhar Guleri, *Indian Journal of Economics*, vol. i, part iv, p. 467.



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commissioned, thus to show kindness to them, meaning at the same time no manner of unkindness to him whose money is thus widely distributed.<sup>1</sup>

Dasturi is taken freely by Indian servants on the purchases they make in market for their employers. This is frankly understood, and for the most part it is only when the commission becomes outrageous (or when the Westerner is very new to the country) that inquiries are made. The story is told that an Englishman in Calcutta, eager to make experiments, persuaded his cook, who had been with him for many years, to give him exact accounts for one month on the understanding that the difference would be made up. The accounts came to forty rupees less than the average of other months. The Englishman's next proposal was to add forty rupees a month to the wage of the cook if he would continue to give exact returns, but the reply was (and those who know something of the Calcutta household servant will be able to picture the solemn side-shake of the head accentuated by the chin, and to hear the soft, sad, expostulating tone of the reply): "No Sahib, no fun."

A further custom is that of bargaining. There are now many Indian shops in which prices are fixed and are as clearly defined as in Western ones, but in other shops, in the bazars, and in dealing with private salesmen, the once universal habit of bargaining holds sway. The securing of articles worth a few pice will scarcely be carried through without what appears like a wrangle, and in larger transactions differences of hundreds of rupees will be found between the price asked and that finally accepted. The formula, which may have been more nearly true twenty years ago than it is now, that each salesman asks twice as much as he is willing to take, and each buyer offers half as much as he is willing to give is too simple to be a guide to action.

The very act of bargaining is evidently a delightful pleasure to the Indian dealer. His business is his life,

<sup>1</sup> If he is an Indian it is taken for granted that he knows what is going on and allows for it, and if not, the foreigner's different scale of expenditure is apt to give the idea of limitless wealth.





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So no time spent on it is wasted. A single transaction may last for days. It is an entirely personal matter, a contest between two individualities, and victory must be secured by the seller or he will feel defrauded. This demand for victory in the contest will sometimes make him consent to take less than the value of the object, though probably it never means that he loses money on it. If he is in reality middle man, as is usually the case, it may mean that those who make the article will lose either at the time or later. If he himself has been maker as well as salesman, it probably means that his labour (and that of his family) goes for next to nothing.

Among the economic evils of this system is the fact that the price of labour and of time spent on labour is not only kept at a very low level, but tends to fall out of consideration altogether, that the quality of workmanship tends to deteriorate, and that, even more than other methods of buying and selling, it tends to create and to foster a spirit of greed.

Payment in kind, the exaction of unacknowledged commission, and the custom of bargaining render the position of the poor man less secure; but probably all he suffers from these is an infinitely lighter burden than that imposed on him by the moneylender. It is easy for the cultivator, who must have seed to sow when the furrow lies ready and the rains have fallen, to shut his eyes to the fact that the promise he is making to the moneylender will leave him with only a few handfuls of his harvest. Seed he must have. Can he stand idle in front of his fields while his fellow-villagers sow their corn? Seed sowing is surrounded with religious ceremonies from which he cannot think of himself as excluded, and he hastens off to the bania, leaving thought of harvest-time to the future. He knows, too, that if things become desperate, the moneylender will not refuse to return some poor remnants of his grain, for the village creditor cannot afford to starve out the population.

It is true that no social criticism attaches to indebtedness, but that does not make any difference to the intolerable burden it is to millions of the people of India.



drains their physical strength; it stifles powers of initiative; it saps independence; and it prevents the growth of higher standards of life.

The habit of bargaining is in vivid contrast to a definite wage system, and that is its chief interest for us here. But payment in kind, unacknowledged commission, and crushing indebtedness follow the worker when he enters the new surroundings of industrial labour, and are amongst the things that entirely change these conditions from anything known in the West.

The usual standard by which literacy is judged is whether a person can write a letter to a friend and can read the reply. When considering more especially social and economic conditions, it would probably be well to include with this, elementary knowledge of simple arithmetic. Beyond the number of those who are in this sense literate, there are numbers of intelligent and keen people who can dictate the letter though they can not read it, and who catch very quickly the points of the reply when read to them by another; whose minds are stored with religious stories and precepts of Hinduism or of Islam, and who are able to form judgments on the subjects that come immediately under their notice. At present, the great demand for economy and the vast sums of money that would have to be expended on village education, if it were made free and compulsory, hinder rapid progress in that direction. Village schools are scattered very irregularly throughout the country. In the Bombay Presidency there are about one to every eleven square miles; in the Punjab, one to nineteen square miles, and in the Central Provinces, one to twenty-five square miles. The difficulty experienced in securing a sufficient number of trained and qualified teachers renders much of the teaching in the country schools that exist entirely inadequate. Besides Government schools and Mission schools<sup>1</sup> there are, scattered in certain areas, little Muslim schools conducted by the

<sup>1</sup> See *Village Education in India*, The Report of a Commission of Inquiry; *Schools with a Message in India*, by D. J. Fleming, Ph.D.; *Report on the Expansion and Improvement of Primary Education in Bengal*, 1921, by Evan E. Biss, I.E.S.





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officials of the local mosques. In these the boys of the neighbourhood are taught their daily religious exercises and the Koran, but ordinary secular education is apt to be very unsatisfactory when it is not entirely lacking. On the other hand, where the moulvi<sup>1</sup> is interested and keen, he may do a great deal for his pupils, and the idea that he is responsible for their social and moral teaching is one that wins a response from the people.

Amongst the Hindus in some districts, a man with a certain amount of education, who is carrying on a trade or profession, and wishes to add a little to his income, may look round the neighbourhood in which he is and choose a village whose inhabitants are able to secure him a return in the way of fees if he opens a school. He may make friends with a rich man in the locality and get his permission to use a corner of his verandah, or he may settle down in front of the village post office, or open his first class in a little bamboo or matting hut that he erects for himself. When he has gathered his pupils, he may apply for a grant to the municipality or to the district board, or to an inspecting officer. If he gets on well, it is quite possible that another like him may come to that village, or to the next village, and set up a rival school, while hundreds of villages in the neighbourhood are entirely neglected. The primary schools are in many places treated as crèches, and children are taken away after the first class or the second; in other cases, the child may spend three or four years in the infant class and leave without being able to read for lack of trained teachers.

There is a very strong wave of feeling throughout the educated and reforming body of the Indian people in favour of compulsory and free education,<sup>2</sup> but the salaries that are proposed for the teachers are so small that it is very doubtful if any more educative programme than the one which at present prevails will be undertaken. Education is one of the transferred departments and thus comes under the control of the Provincial Councils,

<sup>1</sup> Muslim priest.

<sup>2</sup> See *Reconstructing India*, by Sir M. Visvesvaraya, K.C.I.E., pp. 256 f.



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and a further difficulty will arise owing to the strength of the present reaction against taxation and the unwillingness of the new Councils to risk incurring the particular kind of unpopularity that comes with increase of rates.

A steady advance in education is hampered at present by the uncertainty that is felt with regard to the kind of change that is necessary in order to make elementary teaching meet the real needs of the people more fully. While uncertainty and wide difference of opinion exist on this subject, a steady forward policy can scarcely be looked for. Yet, if India is to come to her own, these problems must be worked out. Expression of opinion comes from the representatives of the small literate groups, and, on their developing national conscience, much will depend; but the answer to the questions so eagerly asked to-day with regard to the future of India lies with the thronging multitudes, with their indescribable charm, and with those peculiar characteristics that suggest that the sources of individuality have only to be set free. For the Indian crowd, while it is, as all vast assemblages of people are, an inclusive symbol of the race, with its needs, its longings, and its pressures, cannot easily be dismissed as an agglomeration of similar units. It breaks up continually into groups, and into individuals, with qualities and potentialities as yet unrealized.<sup>1</sup>

It is easy to ask why, if such possibilities exist, there has been so little evidence of them; but the question is not easy to answer, and the war of opinions that wages on every aspect of Indian affairs makes it still more difficult. Caste, climate, the rule of an alien race, extreme poverty, are each called in to bear the whole burden, but the causes surely lie deeper than any of these though these have had their share in creating and increasing them.

In Hinduism, religion and devotion are almost synonymous. This tends to exalt harmlessness and the observance of ritual to the exclusion of the effort to realize active qualities in character, in search for truth,

<sup>1</sup> "The greatest asset of the country is the hitherto undeveloped intelligence and unorganized strength of its masses."—*Report on Primary Education in Bengal*, by Evan E. Biss, I.E.S., p. 7.



in achievement. While it has inspired sainthood and renunciation, it has also helped to perpetuate animistic worship and a pathetic reverence for powers of evil. The fatalism of the East, so conspicuous in the doctrine of Karma and in Muslim teaching, has prevented the development of the sense of indirect responsibility. The individual is accountable only for his own action, and for its conformity to traditional rule. The results to others that may arise from it are beyond his care. The element of pantheism in philosophic thought has permeated the minds of the simplest village folk. The beauty and spirituality of its expression by poets and thinkers has not prevented it from blurring the outlines of moral values in the daily life of the people. The caste system, while it strengthens group-loyalty, tends to make those under its sway suspicious of strangers and indifferent to unfamiliar aspirations.

Education does not usually carry scholars far enough to make them free citizens of literature, able to claim their mental and spiritual inheritance there at will, and because it does not, it must all the more have as its aim the presenting of ideals which will act on these obstacles to progress—ideals which will emphasize the positive side of human personality and character, which will rouse a sense of responsibility for things other than the daily round of customary family duties and ritual, and will encourage the spirit of confidence and co-operation in place of that of suspicion and reserve.

It is impossible to touch on any subject connected with India to-day without referring to the political situation. The resolutions of the Government of India Act had to be carried out at a time of great difficulty. The reaction after the war had affected life in many ways. The position of Turkey, as the representative of the Muslim faith, had been made the occasion of widespread agitation. Agrarian troubles in the Panjab had increased political restlessness, and the sudden and arbitrary action taken at Amritsar in 1919 had roused intense feeling throughout India. Extreme Nationalists refrained from taking any part in the elections for the first reformed



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councils, and the result was that only a small amount of the political interest of the country was focussed on the Legislative Assembly and on the Provincial Councils. The meetings and decisions of the National Congress, and the work of its Executive Council, formed a rival and very powerful centre of interest.

In 1913 it was possible to write : "The desires and aspirations of the advanced party are somewhat nebulous. They know well enough that such a thing as a united India, with its various races, castes, and creeds, is impossible."<sup>1</sup> It is doubtful whether anyone as familiar with India now as the writer was in 1913 would be willing to maintain that to-day. The use of English as a common tongue has been the means of creating a corporate consciousness throughout the educated classes. The personality of Gandhi, his programmes and his insight in the choice of symbols, have forged links between the illiterate of many nationalities, and have also united thousands of Indians of varying castes in one symbolic act. Home spinning with the charka<sup>2</sup> has always been done to a very large extent, but recently hand-loom weavers have been increasingly dependent on millspun yarn. Less and less were the cultivating class filling their unoccupied time in the ancient way. To him there were many arguments in favour of the reintroduction of spinning in homes from which it had vanished, and its encouragement where it was falling into disuse. He pictured the general poverty of the people relieved by the constant, though small, payments to be gained from its use. He saw independence of western civilization secured for the peasant folk. He saw it drawing men and women away from idle talk, from the railways, from the law courts. To him it typified the utter reaction of his soul from the evils of western civilization, a reaction which had gone so far that he saw nothing but evil in the system into which he had entered in earlier years, and with which he had tried to co-operate. There was genius in his choice of the spinning-wheel as symbol of his gospel of rebirth for the

<sup>1</sup> See *The Silent India*, by S. J. Thomson, C.I.E., I.M.S., p. 6.

<sup>2</sup> Spinning-wheel.





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self-respect of his countrymen. The charka was a thing tangible and visible, linked with deep hereditary instincts. It could be used in the poorest hut, and no caste law shut it out from a place of honour in the strictest Brahmanical home.

The wearing of plain clean white homespun or khaddar was his other symbol, and its value as a symbol is perhaps only second to that of the charka. A long platform in Ahmedabad station, seen from the window of an incoming Rajputana mail, remains as a picture of Gandhi's ideal vanguard of Indian nationality. It was night, and the brilliant colourings of countless turbans and saris appeared in strong light and shade where the glare of the station lights fell on them, and sank into dimness in the intervals. Small groups of Europeans watched the passing windows for the faces of friends. But between that customary scene and the train stood a silent, motionless line, two or three deep, of men with white caps, white shirts, white dhotis.<sup>1</sup> They were waiting thus in ordered ranks to salute a saint as he passed southwards through the city.

Gandhi belongs to the Hindoo Vaishya, or Merchant caste. He was born in Gujarat in 1869. He was called to the English Bar, and has practised in the High Court of Bombay. He took part in organizing Indian Ambulances in South Africa during the Boer War and in recruiting in the Punjab during the European War. In Africa he took an active part in trying to secure better conditions for Indians in Natal. His unique personality has won for him the reverence of large bodies of Muslims, who think of him as their "Wale," or Holy Protector, and through his efforts and his strenuous preaching of passive resistance he has united the sympathies of educated Hindus and Muslims in a remarkable degree. Many whose hopes for India are of a materialistic type revere him and quote him in criticism of others, while they use great liberty in explaining many of his sayings to suit their own policy, until explaining bears a very close resemblance to explaining away. And, indeed, he

<sup>1</sup> A piece of cloth worn round the thighs by the Indian man. One corner of the garment frequently hangs free, reaching to the ankles.



himself, in his efforts to secure Swaraj,<sup>1</sup> has compromised with his ideals in various directions.

The Swadeshi<sup>2</sup> movement began in the end of last century. At first its efforts were directed mainly towards the advancement and development of Indian home industry. Later, especially during the agitation roused by the partition of Bengal, it embodied a definite policy of boycott of British goods. At first Gandhi repudiated this method of propaganda as out of line with the policy of passive resistance, but later he adopted it and carried it to greater extremes. He demanded of his followers the burning of all foreign clothes that they possessed and the effort to persuade others to do the same. The persuasion in many cases was far from non-violent in spirit, and in some cases was actually violent in deed. In some parts of the country men and boys began to wear the plain little Gandhi cap from economy, because the turban was a costly headdress, and was easily snatched from their heads to be thrown on the cart that conveyed the foreign goods to the bonfire.

Before Gandhi's trial he had indefinitely postponed the campaign of mass civil disobedience or passive resistance, which he had several times been on the point of inaugurating. His reason was that the country was not ready for it. Since his imprisonment, interest has been largely focussed on the question whether the Congress, when it met at Gaya, would reverse its former decision<sup>3</sup> to discourage members from standing for election to the reformed Councils, which had been reached under Mr. Gandhi's influence.<sup>4</sup>

Gandhi's brief leadership may seem but an episode in the history of Indian political agitation, but so powerful an influence will not pass without leaving permanent results. As far as it is possible to glean his settled convictions from his somewhat conflicting writings, he would repudiate the suggestion that the more active virtues,

<sup>1</sup> Home Rule.

<sup>2</sup> Home Industry.

<sup>3</sup> The opinion of the Congress at Gaya was divided on this subject and on others. Four parties have been formed. See *Indian Social Reformer*, July 7th.

<sup>4</sup> See "India" in the *Round Table*, September 1922.





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that achievement, that the search for truth, are necessary to the highest development of human character. His descriptions of the ideal life leave little room for the development of corporate responsibility. His own struggles with the sense of indirect responsibility for the results in riot of propaganda in which he insisted on non-violence in deed, while he expressed and inspired bitter violence of thought, found expression in his letters to the papers and in his statement at the time of his trial. But no call to his fellow-countrymen to trust each other and to co-operate with each other could be clearer than his. In his eagerness for this his tendency was to believe that it was already there.

In the passionate nationalism in which he dreams of a day when the world will be Indianized he presents an interesting contrast to Rabindranath Tagore. To Gandhi all evil comes from western civilisation. Tagore's great fear is that India will strive for nationality at the cost of her soul. To him a nation is "that aspect a whole population assumes when organized for a mechanical purpose," "the organized self-interest of a whole people."

If he writes, "we who are no nation," in opposition to the emphasis laid by most Indian reformers on the growing unity of India, it is not that he may rest there. He goes on to prove that India's special problem has been, and still is, to deal with different races living in contiguity with each other. In this twentieth century, the relationship with the British Government is included in this race problem.

His effort has been to make a way for world-wide co-operation,<sup>1</sup> and he demands of the immediate future the co-operation of India and Britain, not only for the sake of these two countries, but for the benefit of the world.

Tagore shares with Gandhi the idealization of simplicity, but while he wishes to keep as much as possible of simplicity of life, and large margins of leisure, he wishes also to secure for India all that is finest in world-thought and scientific discovery.

<sup>1</sup> See "Letters from Abroad," by Rabindranath Tagore, *Modern Review*, Calcutta, December 1922. See also *Nationalism*, by Rabindranath Tagore; and *Indian Nationality*, by R. N. Gilchrist, I.E.S., pp. 154 f.



is willing to welcome the gifts of western civilization, but he is as strong as any other could be on the necessity that constructive work must come from within India herself ; otherwise she is bound to be a beggar and to ask for privileges which she should rise to claim.

It is perhaps because representatives of many races unite to form the people of India that patriotic feeling gathers to so great an extent round the thought of the country itself. The national Indian song, "Bande Mataram,"<sup>1</sup> "All Hail, Oh Motherland," brings this out. It is easy to discuss whether the mingled populations of India can ever become one consolidated nation, but the slightest geographical knowledge shows that India is a complete whole cut off from the rest of the world in spite of the many varieties of her climate and her soil. This consciousness of the close connection between the country and her children is a very real element in modern thought as it is expressed by nationalists.

- 1 "We have no mother,  
We have no father,  
No brother, no wife, no child,  
No hearth, no home.  
We acknowledge nothing save the motherland.  
My motherland I sing ;  
Thou art my head, Thou art my heart.  
My life and soul art Thou,  
My soul, my worship, and my art.  
Before Thy feet I bow."

The song is taken from the novel *Ananda Math*, written in 1772, by Bankim Chandra Chatterjea. It is probable that in the original the meaning was "Mother's Land"—the land of Mother Kali ; but the song was adopted by those who agitated against the division of Bengal, and has at least added this second meaning, even if it still retains something of the first. See *A History of the Indian Nationalist Movement*, by Sir Verney Lovett, K.C.S.I., p. 62.





## CHAPTER IV

## THE COMING OF MODERN INDUSTRY

THE outline already given may serve as a background against which the gradual entrance of modern industry into India may be seen. But the things sketched are much more than a background. They are the warp on which a people's life is woven; and they enter into and continue to affect that life when it is lived within factory walls and amid the clamour of the untiring machines.

(There are more than three hundred and nineteen million people in India. In the year 1921, a hundred, two thousand and seventy-five women were working in cotton and jute mills, and ninety-one thousand nine hundred and forty-nine in mines.<sup>1</sup>) When these figures are considered, it will be realized what a very slight impact on the life of the women of India organized industry has made as yet, and it might seem at first sight that many other problems make a greater demand on study than this comparatively small one. But with further thought the conviction comes that the importance of the matter is out of all proportion to the numbers at present affected. Modern industry, though a very small element in the life of the people at the present day, is now developing rapidly. Apart from statistics which show the increasing numbers of workers, the new buildings rushing up in mill areas tell their own tale. Along the banks of the Hooghly, in Ahmedabad, in Broach, in Surat, in Bombay, in Sholapur, in Coimbatore, and in Nagpur, the sounds of building mingle with the noise of machinery. Often the original

<sup>1</sup> Fifty-seven thousand four hundred and three of these were working below ground.



seems dwarfed by the more imposing additional sheds that have been erected in the wide compound. At the other end of the scale, large letters on the gate of a compound in an unimportant street may call attention to the opening of a yet unregistered mill. Within the gate of one of the latter type a little office stood ; beyond that there was a small, empty yard and at the further side some ramshackle buildings. The leisurely manager pointed to cast-off engines from another mill and hoped to have them in working order in a fortnight. In the sheds where the dilapidated machinery lay, a group of men and women stood looking at it, but they took no active part in handling it, nor did they seem in any hurry to see the work, at which they hoped to be employed, actually commenced. This was a typical instance of the haphazard and happy-go-lucky way in which small enterprises spring up alongside of, but on entirely different lines, from the larger and more up-to-date factories.

Into the outlook of another infant cotton mill a new element had entered. The small place employed only a few workers, and its premises were of the simplest ; but its manager had worked in Nagpur in one of the most advanced groups of mills in India, and his experience there had made him dream dreams. As he stood on the threshold of the shed and looked out on the wide unoccupied spaces that surrounded it, he saw, and made his hearer see, new buildings with large ventilating shafts and open compounds, busy with life—"Just like the Empress Mills."

There are those who ask if it is necessary to look forward to a great expansion of factory industry in India, and there are not a few who still hope that India will hold herself to a great extent apart from commerce, develop her village life, and recreate her handicrafts, and in the main let the modern world go by. There are those who are working with this end in view, and their work and their ideals are factors that must be taken into consideration in all thought of the future of India.

But there are other forces at work ; prominent amongst these is the Swadeshi Movement, inspired, not only by





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the desire to improve Indian trade and commerce independently of Europe, but also by the desire that India should take her place in the van of commercial life, that she should be again, as she was once before, though now in entirely changed conditions, the centre of the world's trade.

It is true that one line of the Swadeshi movement emphasizes the desirability of village industries and hand manufacture, and works for a return to primitive economic conditions for all. But there is also a widespread desire expressed by a large number of the keenest nationalists, for a prosperous and progressive industrial policy along modern lines. The strength of this desire is shown by the way in which it is taken for granted by many of Gandhi's followers that his demand that every man should spin his own yarn and weave his own clothing is a temporary one, and is not typical of his permanent ideals for the future.

The strong determination to press forward in modern industry and to take a prominent place in the world of commerce, found expression in the demand that India should be recognized by the League of Nations as one of the eight nations of chief industrial importance whose Governments have a right to nominate members for the governing body of the International Labour Office.\*

Even if this attitude were not present, it is exceedingly doubtful whether it would be possible for the country to remain outside of the modern industrial system. Whether Indian enterprise and capital are turned into this channel or not, the opportunities for the opening of factories by outsiders would continue and increase, and would be taken advantage of by employers of other nations. The fact that the vast majority of the people

\* The list of the eight states of chief industrial importance adopted by the International Labour Conference in Washington in 1919 did not include India. A formal complaint was presented by the Indian Government to the Council of the League of Nations at San Sebastian, on August 5, 1920. This led to the re-examination of the criteria on which the selection had been based. On September 30, 1922, the Council adopted a resolution which entitled India to representation on the governing body of the International Labour Office. An account of the inquiries and discussions which led to this result is given in the Official Bulletin of the International Labour Office for December 20, 1922.



cultivators is not a sufficient reason for believing that industrialism has no justifiable sphere to fill in their progress. There are those, indeed, who trace the present poverty to the fact that the choice of occupations is so limited.

The first effort to introduce modern mill industry into India is surrounded with tragedy. In 1818 a group of Lancashire girls were taken out to Bengal to introduce factory methods of work there. The old mill at Bowreah to which they went, stands on the western bank of the Hooghly, some miles below Calcutta. Heavy, white-washed tombs in the rank grass of a small cemetery near the mill compound still keep in remembrance the swift death to which many of them fell victims.

But the beginning of the development in India of mills driven by steam was in the 'sixties. In 1851 the first cotton mill in the Bombay Presidency was opened in Gujarat, and three years later this was followed by the opening of a jute mill at Serampore. The success of these pioneer factories encouraged the erection of others. On the whole, increase has been slow but, as has already been noted, there are now signs of a much more rapid expansion.

The opening of mills in country districts has not so greatly changed the lives of those working in them as has the centralization<sup>\*</sup> of the new power in cities and in their outskirts. It is in the congested mill areas on the Hooghly in Bengal, in Bombay, in Ahmedabad and in Cawnpore that most of the special problems involved have to be worked out.

It is interesting to note that Gujarat, which saw, in the seventh century, the departure of the colonists of Java, and Bengal, from which still earlier adventurers set sail, should be the first regions invaded by the new mechanical industries. It recalls the fact, could it at any time be forgotten,<sup>\*</sup> that commerce and industry have a long history in India.

Neither with regard to cotton nor to jute was the discovery of the possibilities of the raw material the work

<sup>\*</sup> See pp. 257 f.





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of a foreigner. Jute had been grown for centuries and had been made into coarse cloth for bags throughout Bengal. It was the common material for the garments of the poorest of the people when the demand for clothing became more widespread. It is still used by some of the aboriginal tribes. The increase of the corn trade of the world brought a great demand for rough gunny-bags. And for a time the Bengal peasant found himself sure of a market for home-woven jute. At this period the manufacture in India was entirely a home industry. All the processes through which the jute plant passed, from its sowing in the ground to its final appearance as a bag ready for export, were carried out in the districts in which it was grown. These districts cover a narrow area, and therefore changes in the methods of spinning and weaving jute affect a comparatively small number of the population. Though the introduction of suitable machinery for jute weaving in Dundee made the home-weaving of it no longer profitable for the Bengali peasant, the fact that he could at once take part in growing jute for export made the upheaval less serious than it would otherwise have been.

The conditions of the growing, spinning, and weaving of cotton touch the interests of the whole country. Everyone wears cotton in some form or other. The sari,<sup>1</sup> the turban, the dhoti<sup>2</sup> of the masses of the people are of cotton. The symbolic shirt of the Parsee woman must be of cotton, however rich the silk of her sari and skirt may be. The history, too, of the jute industry is short when it is compared with that of cotton. The muslins of India, the finest of which have been described as "woven winds," were known in Rome in the days of her power. In spite of the upheavals of Muslim invasion and the depression of enterprise which accompanied the decay of the Moghul Empire, these and other exquisite fabrics were freely made in many centres until the

<sup>1</sup> A long piece of cloth, which, draped in widely differing ways, is the principal garment of the Hindu woman.

<sup>2</sup> A shorter piece of cloth worn round the thighs of the Hindu man.



beginning of the nineteenth century. Much of the earliest trade of the East India Company was in costly Eastern cloths, curios, and spices. Its policy was the common policy of the time. It was that of the man of enterprise and initiative who takes for granted that his methods are the obvious ones, and who thinks little of the retiring yet beautiful possibilities that he may be crushing in his stride. In order to have large supplies from which to select, the control of entire markets was secured, and artisans were forbidden to sell any of their work till the Company's officers had made their choice. Great injury was done to Indian industries and craftsmanship. The injustices were probably neither more intentional nor more heartless than those done by sections of the home community to other sections, but coming as they did in the intercourse between peoples of different races, they bear international consequences. Initiative was discouraged and the natural internal trade of the country hampered.

With the culmination of the industrial system in Britain this policy was reversed. Instead of the endeavour to gather the best that India's craftsmen could offer for European markets, came a sudden effort to close the British market by prohibitive tariffs against manufactured textiles, an enhanced demand for raw material, and a determined effort to return that raw material to India either in the form of yarn or of cloth.

It is little wonder that intense bitterness is felt in India to-day on economic grounds. When those who look at cotton from the point of view of Lancashire demand protection from the competition of manufacturers supported by cheap labour, they forget the greatness of the debt that British industries owe to those of the country whose interests have been sacrificed. They forget, too, in spite of many reminders, that the stronger stamina of the Englishman makes it possible for him to do on an average as much work in two hours as an Indian can in six, and that machinery costs about twice as much there as here. These facts are no justification of inadequate wages, which must be dealt with from an international





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point of view, but they do affect the propaganda that seeks to use tariffs to force British goods on India.

Reference has already been made to the fact that it is often questioned whether it would not have been better to keep modern industrialism out of India. It is an interesting theoretical question, but it is one that exists in theory alone. In the present world-outlook no great nation can be isolated and left to pursue a policy entirely different from that of its neighbours, still less can it be forced to withdraw itself from the general life of the world. The fact that in the west the social possibilities of the great discovery of mechanical forces have been misunderstood and lamentably misdirected, does not prevent the latter from opening a world-wide opportunity. There is still the possibility that India may be prevented from blundering in her application of the new power to so great an extent as the West has done.

In the east, modern industry is as yet isolated from the general life of the people, and could be modified more easily than it could in lands where it has been in operation for more than a century. At the same time, it must be acknowledged that the reasons that make it impossible for a progressing eastern country to remain unaffected by modern industrialism, make it extremely difficult for her to follow a line of her own, if she does take part in its activities.

While allowance is made for that fact, it may be suggested that a study of countries entirely in the current of industrialism, governed in commerce and manufacture by its demands and sanctions, and of countries that are slowly opening their territories to its operations, does not supply a complete account of the forces that have to be taken into consideration, nor of the public on which they may be expected to take effect. In all parts of the world to-day there are those who are asking why the enlargement of human powers that came with the inventions of Arkwright and his fellows have not led to the enfranchisement of mankind, and who hope and believe that means will yet be devised whereby such a liberation may come. A foreshadowing of the fulfilment of their hope may be



seen in the widespread influence of the Labour Conference held in Washington in 1919.

The deliberations that preceded the calling of the Conference, and the results that have sprung from its discussions and from the conventions adopted by its members show, at least, that men are ready to recognize and acknowledge, with new earnestness, the evils that have been bound up with western civilization, and are asking how these evils can be eliminated. The realization that an adequate answer to this question is of vital and urgent importance, not to individual nations only, but to the whole human race, is being forced on the public conscience in many lands. The question before India is not whether she will wander off on an isolated path, but whether she will take advantage of the opportunity that is open to her and throw herself into line with progressive thought and action.

The fact that her modern developments are still pliable, gives to those who seek that she should lead in the counsels of the nations this clear line of advance. They may demand from industrialism that it create no new evils, and that it be ready to receive and to act upon information concerning the effect it is producing on the moral and social standards of those whom it employs.





## CHAPTER V

## THE GROWING AND GINNING OF COTTON

IN the heart of India, on a certain Government map,<sup>1</sup> there is an area coloured solid red. It is the only one. The district is that around Amraoti in the Central Provinces, and the reason for its unique colouring is that there alone the growing of cotton occupies more than fifty per cent. of the land under cultivation. From this patch on the map large areas of lesser degrees of redness stretch, till the sprinkled dots on a white ground, that denote areas in which only one per cent. of the cultivated ground is occupied by cotton, give place to islands and strips of pure white. From Kashmir in the north to Tinnevely in the south the only large areas that grow no cotton are in south Orissa, in Bengal and in the north-west of Rajputana.

The largest proportionate quantity of cotton is grown round Amraoti, but special interest centres on other districts where important experiments are being carried on with a view to improve the quality of Indian cotton. Its value depends on the colour, the silkiness, and the length and strength of its fibres. The chief defect of Indian cotton is the shortness of the fibre. In the past there seem to have been strains of long-stapled cotton grown in districts from which they have now entirely died out. In modern times, until quite recently, Indian cottons have varied from less than half an inch to about three-quarters of an inch in staple. The story of the efforts made during the years since 1840 to increase the length has told of repeated disappointments, but there are large areas in the south of the Bombay Presidency in

<sup>1</sup> See Cotton Maps of India, Nos. 1 and 2:



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which American varieties, introduced many years ago, have persisted. And in the Punjab and in Sind recent selections of American strains have brought good results. Another imported strain is much grown in South India. Successful experiments in improving Indian strains are being carried on in the Broach district. But as yet it has not been found possible to get cotton of longer staple than a little over an inch, about the length of medium American, into general cultivation in any part of the country.<sup>1</sup> Carelessness in picking and in packing further lessens the value of Indian cotton for export to Western countries.

The cotton plant is a small shrub<sup>2</sup> something like a young black-currant bush. In Indian fields its height varies from one and a half or two feet in poor ground to three or four feet in good conditions and under careful treatment. The bush tapers to a point and bears leaves with divided lobes on long slender stalks. The flowers are like single hollyhock blossoms, and are usually yellow or white in colour. When the flower withers the seed vessel is seen to form a fruit divided into several compartments in shape not unlike the outer cover of the cape gooseberry though not like it in colour. When the boll is ripe, the outer shell bursts open and shows masses of silky lint which is attached to and entirely covers the seeds. This mass of fibre may remain partially within the burst boll or it may overflow and hang down like a small bunch of white tassels.

But the cultivation of cotton does not go on without labour. The cotton seed, if used on unirrigated land dependent on rainfall, may have to be sown three times before a crop is secured. The seasons for sowing and for picking vary much, as the rains reach different parts of the continent at different dates, and as the growing and ripening processes may take anything from five to nine months. The appearance of the plants above ground is

<sup>1</sup> See *Report of the Indian Cotton Committee*, 1919, p. 5.

<sup>2</sup> Different varieties of tree cotton are found, but scarcely any use is made of these in modern industry. One variety is grown near temples. Its fibres are woven into the sacred cord worn by Brahmans. The lint of another variety is in use for stuffing beds and cushions.



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followed by a busy season of thinning out, weeding, and turning the soil to retain moisture. As harvest approaches, the plants need less attention, and there is a lull before the heavy labour that comes with the picking season.

In certain areas the picking of cotton is done entirely by women, and the crop is considered the perquisite of the wife of the cultivator. The management is left in her hands, and she, with women relatives, neighbours, and hired workers, carries through the long drawn-out and exacting work. The bolls ripen gradually. They must not be pulled too early in the day while they are still wet with dew, nor must they remain on the branches till the heat of the sun has made the leaves and the seed vessels brittle. This involves a pressure of work during limited hours at the height of the season and long periods of careful garnering of the earlier and later fruits. With the demand for mass production and the increasing quantity of raw cotton that is spun and woven far away from the fields where it is grown, the middleman, the contractor, and the overseer become prominent.

In a year of good growth there is little space left between the bushes. The harvest field presents a fairly level surface, rising from which are seen the figures of groups of women. The early sunshine, falling on heads and shoulders, emphasizes the colours of the saris, while the faces turned away from the sun, and shaded by the overhanging drapery, are in deep shadow. The cotton is packed into large canvas sacks, and beside the sack, or near it, appear the white coat and black circular cap of the overseer.

At one corner of the field, or at the point where a road most nearly approaches it, masses of picked cotton\* are piled, and there is found the life and stir that is never absent from country meeting-places or from the ordering of any business. The medley of colour and movement is wonderful. Carts laden high with cotton linger without any movement towards starting. Empty carts edge forward to secure a good lading-place. The bullocks are tugged this way and that. Everyone shouts orders

\* Cotton before it is ginned is known as kapas; after ginning, as lint.



cept perhaps the tall rigid Pathan watchman with his lathi grasped shoulder high. Over this tumultuous scene stretches the brilliant blue sky. A clump of trees gives shade to some of the busy group, and forms a dark background against which the coloured turbans of the men, the painted horns of the bullocks and the brilliant masses of cotton, like hillocks of glittering white snow, stand out in dazzling relief.

If the cotton is examined more closely and in the shade it does not look so white. The dirty appearance is given to it by broken twigs, leaves, bits of the shell or of the seed-vessel and by dust.

From the field the kapas is taken away to some local cotton market or straight to a ginning factory. These factories and the presses that are often found within their compounds need little machinery, and are scattered over the districts where the raw material is grown. Often they are found on the outskirts of country towns.

The local cotton market presents the features of the lading of the carts by the roadside multiplied many times over. There is more diversity of local colour perhaps, but the masses of cotton are shrouded under canvas covers which only allow flashes of white to appear here and there. From the market-place tall chimneys may be seen. Some of these are slim and slight, and probably belong to ginning factories. The more massive ones suggest that in this rural town spinning and weaving mills are flourishing. The raw cotton, bought in the hubbub of the market, is carried to the wide, quiet and, at first sight, almost empty compound of the ginning factory. Some factories have corrugated iron sheds in which to store their raw material, but very often much of the unginned cotton is dumped on the ground in huge mounds recalling the snowy hillocks by the roadside, with here and there a soiled patch that looks like the bit the spade has touched in shovelling it.

A handful of the kapas shows that the fibres are not soft and intermingled like cotton wool, but separate, silky, and glossy. A microscope reveals the slight twist in the fibre that makes it so good a material for spinning. The





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natural spiral co-operates with and strengthens the artificial twist by which, later, the fibres are held together in the finest threads. In highly skilled hand-spinning the length of the fibres is less important than in machine spinning. Trained fingers give much gentler treatment than machinery does.

To such a town, people whose agricultural holdings in the surrounding districts have not been able to maintain them, gather, some to settle permanently, some to move on later to the cities. There are others, resident in the groups of villages that form the suburbs, who find that the household level of subsistence is falling. A woman belonging to one or other of these groups can see from her hut door or from the well, the bullock-carts pass along the road towards the town, top-heavy with their loads of kapas. As she watches them day after day her mind becomes accustomed to the thought of the factories. It has been her custom to do her home work ; to grind the corn, to scour the brass dishes with sand till they shine again, to prepare the meals, to look after the children. There has been much hard work, much monotony, some leisure, and many family and neighbourly interests in this life. If she has only lately come with her husband from their country home, she will find her new interests both wider and narrower. The former day's work was harder, for it probably included tending and milking cattle, working in the fields, weeding, and harvesting. It included, too, long hours of watching from perches to scare birds from the grain. If famine conditions have driven the family into the outskirts of the town, her last memories of the old home may be of watching grain that would never be worth reaping, of seeing goats, buffaloes, cattle, and sheep grow thinner and thinner, perhaps of the day when they were sold for next to nothing, to be bought again, if ever fortune turned sufficiently for that, at full value ; of visits to moneylenders ; of the family council and the decision that her husband should be the first to go.

Here she finds that the wages the husband earns, though they sounded large at first, do not go far when every drink



of milk, every seer<sup>1</sup> of grain, every pot of ghi<sup>2</sup> must be paid for by annas<sup>3</sup> and pice.<sup>4</sup> The hut in which they live may be no smaller than the one they had in the country, but instead of the fields and the far horizon, there are rows and groups of other such huts and, over all, as the close afternoon darkens, the smoke of the neighbouring chimneys. The occupants of the huts near hers are not over-friendly, perhaps, and the want of the familiar faces oppresses her. There is little to make her value the leisure she has amongst these strange people and strange surroundings and much to tempt her to follow the women of the neighbourhood to work. So one day she finds her way to the compound of the ginning factory. She may follow her husband there, for he may be one of the coolies that are needed to carry cotton. But as the number of women employed exceeds the number of men it is more probable that husband and wife will take different roads, and that he will go to a spinning or weaving mill. It may be easier at first for the woman to go into the ginning factory, which will close down in a few months' time, than into the cotton mill where there is work all the year round. In entering the latter she may have a fear of being trapped for life, whereas she knows that the other will thrust her out at the end of the season.

Within one compound there may be two or three ginning sheds and a press. The gins are housed in long two-storey buildings, which are slight erections, sometimes of corrugated iron on a wooden frame. The chief entrance is by a flight of outside stairs to the upper storey. The lower storey consists of a somewhat dark shed, often unfloored. Other sets of steps ascend at intervals to platforms which run out from openings in the side<sup>5</sup> walls of the upper storey. From railings at the sides of the platforms large bags hang, and into these men are pressing the lint. A steady rain of cotton-seeds drops into the shed

<sup>1</sup> The imperial seer is two and two-fifth pounds avoirdupois, but the market seer varies greatly. In Bombay it is about twelve ounces

<sup>2</sup> Clarified butter.

<sup>3</sup> See p. 38, note.

<sup>4</sup> About a farthing. Three pies one pice; four pice one anna.

<sup>5</sup> Sometimes these platforms are at one side only of the factory.



below, but this can only be seen by going close up to the building and peering in. The seeds are gathered in baskets and sacks, and many are sold to be ground into food for cattle; oil is made from others. The black, waterproof inner covering sometimes seen on brown paper is one of the last by-products and is made from the refuse of cotton seed oil.

Almost all the seed used for sowing<sup>1</sup> is now ginned in factories; formerly hand-gins were used for this purpose, but this custom has largely fallen into disuse.<sup>2</sup> One of the greatest difficulties that those who are working for the improvement of strains of cotton have to overcome is the extent to which carelessness in collecting the seeds and in allowing various qualities of cotton to mix before it is ginned, tends to deterioration. Selected and improved types, when sold to private cultivators, may lose all their special qualities within a year or two through mixture in the factories. Attempts are being made to have the whole produce of cultivators who are using the same strain ginned together.<sup>3</sup>

Within the upper storey of the factory a bench about four feet high runs along either side of the shed, broken at each exit to the platforms already mentioned. These benches are piled with kapas at the back, and on them, in front of the cotton, the women, some with cloths over their mouths, sit cross-legged, each with a little stick. In front of each one is an oblong box with sides sloping inwards from above in which a large roller revolves. Into this box she feeds handfuls of cotton from the piles behind her, and moves it right and left within the box with her hands and the stick, to keep it evenly distributed.

The seeds are pressed out by the roller,<sup>4</sup> from which

<sup>1</sup> Unginned seed cannot be sown by the drills in use. Even after ginning the fluff that still adheres has to be plastered down.

<sup>2</sup> See p. 7.

<sup>3</sup> In the *Report of the Indian Cotton Committee*, pp. 175 f, methods are suggested by which the mixture and consequent deterioration of cotton may be checked.

<sup>4</sup> Double roller gins are in frequent use. When these are in operation the seeds are pressed between the rollers instead of against one as in the single roller method. Saw-gins are used in certain localities, especially for American varieties of cotton. They are said to turn out a cleaner lint but to weaken the strength of the staple. See *Cotton Growing in India*, by Arno Schmidt, p. 49.



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Driving knives scrape the fibres. The seeds fall down and collect in heaps on the ground in the shed below, while the lint is pushed upwards over the edge of the gin and collects on the floor, from which it is carried in armfuls to be packed into the sacks that hang from the sides of the outer platforms.

The work is light but very monotonous. In most gins there is no apparatus to carry off the dust and fluff, though a comparatively simple appliance has been invented and is in use in some places. There is constant vibration. The buildings are slight, and the power that moves the machinery of the roller-gins makes every timber of floor and of bench oscillate continually.

There are factories of one storey only: In these the ground is hollowed out underneath the gins to receive the seed. The building then vibrates much less, not only because the shed in which the women work is on the ground level but also because the machinery runs along the roof and the whole structure must be built with sufficient strength to support its weight. This plan of building has obvious advantages, but there is much more risk of accident as the overhead driving belts may break.

Ginning is a seasonal trade and for this reason it has obvious advantages for the woman worker. It occupies her, even in the longest season, for six months of the year only; usually for but three or four; and so it leaves her free to keep in touch with home life, and in many districts may even make it possible for her to follow agricultural pursuits at the season at which her work in the fields is most needed. In many areas, more than half of the period of work is in the cool season when the tax on her energies is less than it would be in the heat, and it commences opportunely when the demands for extra food and clothing for her household are apt to be most urgent.

But in many cases any advantages that might come from these sources are more than counterbalanced by the conditions of work that prevail. The scattered and often lonely positions of the factories shut them off from frequent inspection and also from the pressure of local public opinion. The moral conditions prevailing



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where compounds are unlighted and where women are employed before or after daylight hours are often extremely bad.<sup>1</sup> Factory enactments are safely broken when the announcement of the coming of an inspector can be wired on ahead when he boards the train, or carried through forest short cuts after he alights at the station.

In the Punjab, and probably in other localities, children have been exploited in ginning factories.<sup>2</sup> The characteristic story is told of a boy, said to have come with his mother's food, who looked puzzled and made no reply when asked, "Which is your mother?" but answered quick as thought to the question, "How much do you get a day?" "Panch anna," fivepence!

The cotton press stands apart from the ginning sheds, and so do the storage go-downs. In these there is great danger of fire, and a characteristic feature of a good compound is the extensive system of pipes for supplying and directing water in case of need.

Sometimes cotton is partially cleaned and opened out before it is ginned. When this is the case groups of women may be employed picking out leaves and sticks. If the machine for opening the cotton is so arranged that the end at which the cotton enters is in one room and the discharge end in another with a wall between, women may handle the cotton at the feed end. They are not allowed to work where the opened cotton leaves the machine because of the great danger of fire.<sup>3</sup>

There are many different types of press in use. One of the most interesting to watch has a central machine on ball-bearings and three pits, each seventeen feet deep, in the ground.

Cotton is flung into the pits to unseen workers. Gradually the latter rise to the surface as the fibre below them increases, till heads and shoulders appear above the edges of the openings. When the space is full, the

<sup>1</sup> See pp. III, 222.

<sup>2</sup> See *Annual Report on the Working of the Indian Factories Act, 1911, in the Punjab, Delhi, and N.W.F. Provinces for 1915*, by L. H. Taffs, M.A., p. 3, and that for 1920 by W. H. Abel, A.M.I.Mech.E., pp. 2 f.

<sup>3</sup> See the Indian Factories Act, 1911, as modified up to July 1, 1922, sect. 20.



men who have carried lint and flung it in, throw themselves back against mounds of cotton and watch the packers stamp down still further the bulging contents of the pits. These men tramp round and round, each with his arm thrown round another's shoulder and each with one foot on the floor and one in the pit. Then they, too, join the others and watch the machine turn round, collect, and press the contents of the three pits into one bale, which it binds and throws off into a wheelbarrow! Much dust and fluff is in the air, and most of the men wear cloths over their mouths.

The bales are sent off by train to the various spinning and weaving centres in India, or to the harbours for export, chiefly to China or Japan.

Ginned cotton that is destined for local manufacture is not made into bales, but is carted unpressed from the gins to the mills.

Within the compound groups of women may be seen out in the open or in small ramshackle sheds picking cotton that is specially dirty. A heap of empty coco-nut shells dumped down anywhere suggests that for some part of the work a gas engine is used, for "anything will do as fuel to make gas."\* If building or repairing work is going on a large circular mortar and the patient motion of the bullock as he trudges round and round and round his accustomed groove, keeping the pounding stone in motion, may attract attention, or a long string of bullocks drawing empty carts, a dozen or more linked together by a central wire running between each pair of oxen and attached at the far end to an old steam-engine that is being dragged away! Trees, too, and occasionally an owner's bungalow, give diversity to the compounds, and add to the leisurely feeling that so often pervades the surroundings of country industries.

\* The gas engine in one ginning compound had come from Lincoln, and had worked for three years in Dublin.





## CHAPTER VI

## THE SPINNING AND WEAVING OF COTTON

WHEN the spinning of cotton yarn is a home industry, it is possible to keep the fibres clean and unbroken. Small quantities are gathered, ginned by a primitive method,<sup>1</sup> beaten out on a mat, and laid aside ready to be used as leisure permits. The handfuls of cotton fibre needed to keep the shallow basket of the spinner supplied can be picked over carefully, and, if the yarn is to be spun by a specially skilled worker, no tiniest fragment of stick or leaf, no least tangle of knotted fibres, will be allowed to pass through her sensitive fingers. Machinery boasts no such powers, and mass production demands an immense output of energy to achieve the results won so simply on the small scale.

The mere fact that in order to make transport possible the masses of cotton have to be compressed into bales, suggests that labour will be needed to break up these solid blocks and loosen the fibres. Carelessness in picking, the frequency with which the cotton has to be dumped down and collected again, and the gritty particles it gathers from the dust-laden air through which it passes, involve a great amount of artificial labour in the preparatory stages of mechanical production. The practice of damping cotton before it leaves the ginning compounds in order to increase its weight, and the extent to which inferior qualities<sup>2</sup> and waste from mills are mixed with finer strains, tend to depress the value of Indian cottons and to increase the difficulty of producing the finer yarns

<sup>1</sup> Small cultivators sometimes use this method in preparing the cotton from which they wish to secure seed for sowing. It does not cut the seeds as the power gins are apt to do.

<sup>2</sup> See Cotton Report, p. 180.



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from it: In the mill sheds in which the raw cotton is stored, even an unpractised eye notices great differences in the colour and in the lustre of different masses of lint. Closer examination shows that the fibres differ greatly in length, that they lie at all sorts of angles to each other, and that much dirt mingles with the cotton. In order to get a good result, different qualities have to be mixed<sup>1</sup> in definite proportions, dirt must be eliminated, the bunches of lint must be opened out and the fibres guided to lie parallel to each other and to overlap so that the natural spiral curve will help to link one fibre to another. The strength of each fibre of cotton is great. Weak spots in yarn and in material generally arise from the fact that fibres have slipped from each other, not from breakages in the fibres themselves.

The processes of freeing from dirt, and of opening out the fibres, are carried out by heavy machinery, and the cotton suffers considerably from the roughness of the beating and tearing operations that go on in the earlier stages in which it passes through the opener and the scutcher. It emerges from the latter in the form of a comparatively loose lap which is like a sheet of coarse cotton wool. A glance at the lap is enough to show that many impurities have been removed. Dirt, sand, seed, and leaf, being heavier than the fibres, have dropped through grids against which the cotton has been dashed. If the heavy side doors of the waste-chambers are opened for a moment, masses of debris are disclosed. The carding engine begins to lay the separate fibres parallel to each other, and spreads the lap into a gossamer web, which it finally gathers up into a thick soft sliver<sup>2</sup> about an inch wide. As it leaves the carding engine this sliver is coiled into tall round cans in which it is carried to the drawing-frames. In these frames six separate slivers are very gradually drawn out till they emerge as one, the same size as each of the six that entered. This process is repeated three times, in order to secure an even thick-

<sup>1</sup> On different principles from those on which the mixing already mentioned is done!

<sup>2</sup> In appearance a sliver is like a thick woolly braid.



ness throughout the final sliver. The work of laying the fibres parallel to each other is finished in the drawing frame. Drawing still continues in the next group of machines, but it is accompanied by processes which twist the cotton. The latter enters the slubbing machine, the first of this group, as a sliver, and after being drawn still further and very slightly twisted (at this stage from one to four twists occur in an inch) it leaves it a roving, or soft loose cord, which is wound on to large bobbins. It is further drawn and twisted on the intermediate and roving frames, and is then ready for the final processes of spinning, in which the yarn is drawn and twisted, and is wound, in its finished form, on to cops.\*

Yarn for warp differs in character from yarn for weft. The former has to bear the greater strain, running as it does from end to end of the piece of cloth, and must be specially strong and firm. The latter has to bear less stress. It is caught and strengthened at each selvedge, and need not be so firmly spun. But, as it covers the greater part of the warp, it must have the qualities of softness to the touch, lustre, and evenness of colour.

Besides these differences and those that accompany the use of varying qualities of cotton, there are the variations in thickness known as differences of count. Thin yarn is of a high count, and thick yarn of a low one. Each hank of yarn is eight hundred and forty yards long. The count is the number of hanks that weigh one pound. The extent of the variation in coarseness and fineness is seen when the weighted scale rises as the twelfth hank of thick cotton is thrown into the other scale, but needs more than a hundred hanks of fine spun thread to make it move! In Indian mills the counts most generally spun vary from twelve to forty. For materials woven from the finest counts yarn is imported from abroad.

The filled cops from the spinning frames are taken either to the reeling room or to the winding machines. If the spinning mill is not connected with a weaving mill, all its yarn will be taken to the reeling rooms to be reeled into hanks, which will then be bundled into pack-

\* Conical balls of thread wound on spindles.



also ready to be sent to weaving mills, to country markets for home weaving, or to be exported to China, Japan, and other countries.

If, on the other hand, there is a weaving mill in the same compound as the spinning mill all the yarn may be needed by the weavers, and will be wound on to cops for weft and on to bobbins<sup>1</sup> for warp, except the small quantities which may be needed for dyeing or for bleaching. These will go to the reeling department, which in mills that use most of the yarn in their own weaving sheds will be a small one, occupying a free space in a room where other processes are carried on.

In a weaving mill the first process is winding. After the yarn for warp is wound on to bobbins, it is taken to the warping department, and is wound off the bobbins into large balls, or more frequently on to beams, as a first step in preparation for weaving. It is then carried to the sizing machines, in which the threads are drawn through a thin paste to prepare them to withstand the friction they will meet in the loom. The sizing department is one that it is difficult to make healthy. The heavy, steamy atmosphere, the smell and the solid particles in the air are trying even for strong people. These conditions are naturally much worse where large proportions of size are used. The percentage used varies in different localities and for different qualities of yarn, from five per cent. to two hundred.

After the yarn has been sized and is wound on a weaver's beam, each thread has to be drawn through a frame known as the heald. The beam is then ready for attachment to the loom. The weaving shed is usually close and hot, with much moisture in the air. The looms are often so closely packed together that it is difficult to walk between the rows, and the noise is deafening. The final processes of examining for flaws, of calendering, and of folding and bundling for sale, complete the more important operations.

Besides all these processes, there is always much picking of different kinds of waste. In the early departments of

<sup>1</sup> A cylinder for holding thread in the form of a very large reel similar in shape to those used for sewing cotton.





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the spinning mill a certain amount of cotton cleaning and cotton mixing is done by hand. Sweeping must be constantly carried on. There is much carrying from department to department, and where there are no rails and trolleys, this occupies many coolies. Outside in the compound coal heaving or log carrying<sup>1</sup> is needed, and in many cases continuous building goes on.

The majority of the women who work in spinning and weaving mills are employed in reeling, in winding, in waste picking, and in sweeping. In Bombay and in Ahmedabad a large number of women are employed in ring-spinning departments, and there are mills in other places in which this department is not closed to them, though the proportionate numbers are small. In Sholapur, for instance, out of three thousand women working in mills only ten are reported as employed in spinning departments.

In Ahmedabad there are instances in which women are employed in almost all the processes up to beaming. Except in the group of departments already mentioned, and in spinning, at which some three thousand work, the numbers employed are very small, amounting sometimes only to two, five, or ten. But the fact that even a few are there is interesting in view of the fact that women are members of the Trade Unions recently organized in the city.

Besides the bodies of women employed on reeling, on winding, on waste-picking, and in a few cases on ring-spinning, and the stray ones that are found employed on other regular processes, groups of women may be found occupied on various odd jobs in and around mills. In some sheds they fold and damp the hanks of yarn for bundling. In others, a picturesque group will be found seated on the floor in some vacant corner winding coloured yarn by hand on to the simple country reels. The coloured yarn may be for the headings of saris,<sup>2</sup> and if so the quantity required at a time is comparatively small. If all the

<sup>1</sup> In some mills wood is burned in the furnaces.

<sup>2</sup> Saris are made of many designs. In Delhi, Rajputana, and Ahmedabad, some of the most picturesque saris worn by working women



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winding-machines can be used for white or grey yarn, it is an economy to get the coloured yarn done by hand. Work of this kind attracts those of better caste than the other workers, and it is work that older women can do without the fatigue of standing. In the mills where this is piece-work, women can make good wages, and for some it has the added advantage of comparative seclusion which they greatly value. Other groups wind remnants of yarn from unemptied cops into large oval balls for sale to hand-loom weavers in the bazars. This is poorly paid work, but it is light and unexacting. In one mill a woman was seen watering the logs in the furnace-room, and in another several women were arranging bobbins on the warping frames, thus at both ends straying into the departments that are usually occupied by men only.

Where there is a dyeing department women are sometimes found at work on the washing machines and on the oiling machines. They are employed, too, in coolie work, carrying waste, carrying pans full of dust that has been beaten out in the carding frames, and carrying coal. Those employed on the last named work may be women belonging to the regular building staff of the mill who may not be needed at the moment for building processes, and who are therefore free to do other work.

Groups made up of three men and two women may be found on special work, such as pulling down stored bales of cotton. In such cases the group works co-operatively, and wages and bonuses are paid to the leader, who divides them out in a recognized ratio.

The treatment of waste is carried on in very different ways. From the nature of it, the conditions are disagreeable, and where no machinery is used any odd or out-of-the-way place is counted good enough. In the far corners of spinning sheds a group of women may be found sitting

are covered all over with small patterns. In Jaipur and Beawar curtains and saris are spread flat on the pavement and are hand-stamped in a delightfully casual way that yet produces a thoroughly good effect. Most of the saris woven in mills are of white or of one colour throughout with heavy borders at the ends and very narrow borders along each edge. These may be plain or decorated. In one case the words SITA RAM SITA RAM were woven throughout the length of the saris, and formed an ornamental design on the narrow band.





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amongst the waste and sorting out fluff from threads. Or a row of women may be found lining one side of a dark passage. More frequently sheds are set aside for waste-picking, and the workers sit amongst the masses of cotton yarn and fibre sorting them out on various principles, for cotton waste may be used to spin coarse-count yarn in the mill, or may be sold for hand spinning, in the bazars. It is used, too, in great quantities for stuffing bedding, not only in India, but in Europe. In mills where special machinery is installed, a small number of women may have light and pleasant work attending to the mechanical processes. The willow machine for cleaning waste needs two women. The thread extractor for separating thread from fluff needs one, and the bobbin opener which untwists odd remnants of yarn that have been left on bobbins needs another.

The machinery used in winding and in reeling,<sup>1</sup> where the largest number of women who work in cotton mills are employed, is not heavy nor cumbersome. The result is that ventilation, light, and floor space, while they vary from mill to mill, are usually at their best in these departments. Sometimes reelers will be found crowded out of the main sheds into cellars half underground; sometimes the winders are installed at the end of a room filled with spinning frames, and the heat generated by the rapid motion of the spindles and increased by the overhead belting and the cotton dust that fills the air are shared by those at work on the winding machines, but generally speaking the conditions of work in these departments are as good as any in the mills.

The winding machine untwists the yarn from the spun cops and winds it on to bobbins for warp, or on to cops for weft. The worker must see that the spun cops are replaced as they become empty, and that the bobbins are replaced as they become full. But her real skill is shown by the dexterity with which she can join the ends of threads that break. The deftness with which this is done seems unbelievable to an inexperienced onlooker, even if the action is repeated over and over again. Mechanical

<sup>1</sup> There are many reeling sheds where no mechanical power is used.



## THE SPINNING AND WEAVING OF COTTON

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Spotters of different types are in use now, and the pride of the workers in this new tool in mills where it has been introduced is interesting to see. It is evidently a great relief to them, but seems clumsy (again to the inexperienced) in comparison with the wonderful turn and twist of the ends of yarn by the lithe fingers.

Reeling commences with the full cops or bobbins from the spinning frames, but in this department these are wound on to reels whose circumference allows a hank to be stretched round it without sagging. The worker's duty is to see that the reel is supplied with an unbroken length of eight hundred and forty yards of yarn. If a break occurs, it must be pieced as in winding. Care is needed in removing the hanks from the reel and in placing them ready for bundling or for dyeing. In the latter case leasing<sup>1</sup> is necessary to prevent tangling in dyeing or in bleaching.

In some places men and women work side by side on winding frames, and less frequently men are found in the reeling department, but often these two processes are entirely in the hands of women.

<sup>1</sup> Running a thread through at one part of the hank so that groups of threads of yarn are kept separate from each other and can be easily disentangled after dyeing.





## CHAPTER VII

## THE JUTE INDUSTRY

A BRIEF history of the progress of the Jute industry in India has been published under the title *The Romance of Jute*<sup>1</sup>. The name at once suggests the point of view of the writer, and, it may be, brings a smile to the lips of those who are looking for something that might bear the name of romance in the lives of the workers whom the industry employs. That there is romance in the individual lives no one who has laughed with the workers across however imperfect a bridge of language can deny. That the opening of a great new industry might have added to the possibilities of romance for them is surely a reasonable thing to believe. That instead, it often narrows the horizon and closes in the walls of life, is obvious. The hope is, that it, along with all other industrial undertakings of the future, may yet develop so that new doors of interest and opportunity may open to all who share in the labour of manufacture.

It is in the great stretches of fertile land in Bengal where clay and sand are mixed with decayed vegetable matter and where the overflow of the rivers leaves deposits which renew the soil year by year that the world's jute fields lie. It has been stated that the plant will grow in any part of the world where there is sufficient warmth and moisture. It seems to be cultivated to a small extent in Arabia, in Palestine, and in Egypt<sup>2</sup>, for in each of these countries, as also among Hindus and Muslims in India, the leaves are used in cooking. But apparently it has not yet been found profitable to grow it in large quantities

<sup>1</sup> *The Romance of Jute*, by D. R. Wallace.



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except in the river deltas and in the higher ground near them, in Bengal. As its cultivation is confined to one area there are not the same differences of dates in the course of its growth as there are in the cultivation of cotton, which may actually be reaped in one part of India on the day on which it is being sown in another.

Jute seed is sown in March or April, or even in May. When the plants are about a foot high the ground is weeded, but the shoots are left fairly close to each other to prevent excessive branching. The average height of the full-grown plant is from six to ten feet, but in specially favourable circumstances it may reach twenty. The plants bear small yellow flowers in August and September, and it is usually when the flowers appear that the field is cut. If seed is needed for sale or for the coming year, a patch of stems is left uncut till the fruit has ripened a month or two later.

The jute crop does not usually suffer seriously from drought or from insect pests, but it varies greatly in output and quality. It is a rotation crop, and the ground in which it thrives is good for rice-growing. It is thus comparatively easy for the cultivators to increase or diminish the area under jute according to demand. Difficulties arise when the cultivator does not quickly hear of changes in the market, but with the increase of interest in agricultural matters and the educative methods that are being more and more advocated and employed, the necessary information will travel more quickly.

The first mechanical process to which jute is subjected is that of pressing into bales to be shipped down the rivers to Calcutta, but before it arrives at the presses much hand labour has to be expended on it by the peasant cultivators. Near the fields there are large shallow ponds. They may be natural hollows, backwaters from streams, or artificial tanks. Over large districts in Bengal it is only necessary to dig a hole in the ground to get water, and as during the season when the jute is cut the monsoon rains may still be falling, the whole atmosphere is saturated





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with moisture. The long, heavy stalks of jute are tied up in bundles and placed in the water, weighted down to keep them below the surface, and are there allowed to rot for about a fortnight.<sup>1</sup> They cannot be left unwatched, however. A buffalo stumbling into the pool for a bath might so injure the stems as to make them almost useless. The sinking of the water might leave parts uncovered and so make the result unequal. During the steeping season the stench from the innumerable tanks of rotting jute is indescribable. The skilled grower knows just when the stems have been in the water long enough to allow the fibres to come away from the hard, central wood of the stalk. When this stage has been reached, the jute is lifted out of the water and stripped. After this the fibres are washed and dried in the sunshine. In these processes scarcely any part is taken by women. Here and there a wife or child may help in stripping or hanging out to dry, but there is little opening for women's work, and as Bengal is, on the whole, a purdah<sup>2</sup> district, few women of the cultivating classes co-operate in field work. The dried fibres are made into bundles ready for the traders who collect them from the peasants or buy them in local markets. Presses in which the bundles of fibre are made into bales are scattered over the jute-growing districts and at the ports. The bales are sent by ship to Calcutta for use in the mills there, or for transshipment abroad. A distinction is made between the jute that comes down the Hooghly, which is of a rough quality and is dark in colour, and that from Eastern Bengal, from districts round Dacca and Narianganj, which is pale and glossy.

The first operation within the mill is that of opening the bales. The heads or stricks of jute are loosened by the opener and prepared for the batching-shed, where men or women are busy in groups selecting and mixing fibres of different qualities, so that standard batches may be obtained. The next process lubricates the fibres.

<sup>1</sup> Ten to twenty days.

<sup>2</sup> Purdah means curtain. The word is used to denote the seclusion in which many women live.



While the statistics of a few selected mills might suggest that the great majority of women employed in jute mills work in one department, that of sack-sewing and finishing, further inquiry shows that their occupation in different departments right through the mills is much more general than it is in cotton mills. It is not usual, however, for women to work at the feed-end of the softener in which the lubricating process takes place, but there are mills where they do this work either owing to shortage of men's labour or because of special influence.<sup>1</sup>

The softener is a long machine with a moving feed-table, beyond which there are twenty-four or more pairs of fluted rollers. Above these are pipes, from which water and oil drop on to the jute as it passes between the rollers below.

Until a few years ago this machine was very dangerous to the life of the workers. The moving tables are longer than those on the same machines in Dundee, and are provided with the same stop handle, but owing to the looser clothing of workers in India and to their difficulty in taking prompt action when frightened, many men were caught either by their clothing or by jute strands entangled round their wrists, and were drawn into the machinery and killed. Mr. Williamson, an engineer in the India Jute Mill at Serampore, has the honour of inventing an automatic stop which has obviated this danger. It consists of an iron bar in front of, and a short space away from, the feed-table. When pressure is brought against this it at once stops the machinery. It is now obligatory to provide this safeguard, and to keep it in working order. This machine, however, is still the occasion of minor accidents which occur to workers who are trying to steal oil by pushing rags and tufts of soft waste into the machinery in motion. It is a commentary on standards of living.

After the jute leaves the softening machine, the roots and rough portions near the roots are cut off. The bundles of jute, now soft and oily to the touch, are then taken to the breaker carding machines. These are often attended at both ends by women; two feed each machine, and

<sup>1</sup> See pp. 108, 109.





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one manages the cans at the delivery end into which the sliver of jute tow is pressed, removing full cans and placing empty ones. The work of feeding the breaker cards is heavy and needs constant attention, as a scantily fed machine involves waste of engine-power. The softened jute has to be evenly spread on an inclined feeding-sheet in motion, which leads up to the rollers. The breaker card splits, breaks, and combs the long, irregular fibres, and frees the jute from dirt and knotted irregularities. The finisher card continues the work of freeing from dirt, lays the fibres parallel to each other, and commences the drawing process. It also requires the work of three women. One arranges the slivers side by side at the feed end, one takes delivery at the other, and one carries. Workers often have plenty of room to move about as the machinery is large and is not usually jammed closely together, but there are mills in which the machines are very near each other. It is often rather dark but, except for the want of cheerfulness, that is a less disadvantage than glaring light would be. There is no small scale work to be done, so that bright light is not a necessity.

The slivers from the finishing cards are submitted to the processes of doubling, drawing, and twisting, which are carried out on first and second drawing frames and on a roving frame which finally prepares the jute for spinning. In some mills these machines are managed chiefly by women, but in others men predominate. On spinning, there are very few full-time\* women workers, but many are employed on warp-winding and some on weft-winding. The latter is better paid, and men may be more willing to do it, or it may need more skill and therefore be avoided by the women. On beaming, no women work; but in several mills two or three women, brought in by the influence of their husbands, who are in the same shop, weave sacking. They are elusive, however, and may all happen to be absent when looked for!

Throughout the carding departments especially, the stranger has to walk warily to avoid the risk of stepping

\* Half-timer girls are employed to change bobbins.



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baby. With jute-coloured clothing and jute-coloured coat or duster on which to lie, with jute-dust forming a layer of gray tooze over the little head of black hair, there is not much to attract notice. Older children play about quietly or sit in corners. If a breaker machine is idle one or two may be found sound asleep in the bin amongst uncarded jute. The number of children brought varies greatly in different mills and depends much on the attitude of the manager.<sup>1</sup>

A great many women finish sacks, and work at it in a way that seems altogether too strenuous for the hot Indian climate. It is piece-work, and all depends on rapidity. Certain kinds of sack are machine-sewn on the sides and need only to be hemmed round the mouth. Others are hand-sewn throughout. The shed in which this is done is usually large, bright, and airy, and there is plenty of room. Babies and little children sit and lie near their mothers, and it is perhaps typical of the stillness of the Indian child that more accidents may happen to children from their mother's needles drawn back too far or in an unexpected direction than from their own interference with the machinery in other departments.

Hemming machines had been introduced in one mill, but they stood idle, covered up, not because it would not be cheaper and better to use them, but because labour was difficult to obtain and hand-work was employed to keep the women about the place so that they might encourage their children to come as half-timers to the mill. By a curious coincidence a considerable number of men were sewing sacks in that particular mill! Jute is a heavier and rougher material to work with than cotton, and employment on it is counted harder. On the other hand there is not the same need for artificial humidity as in the manufacture of cotton cloth.

There are great differences from mill to mill in the spirit of the workers. In some the women are responsive, good-humoured, and eager to talk. In others they seem tired and dull. Low spirits do not seem to go necessarily

<sup>1</sup> See pp. 103, 231.





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with the lowest wages, for they are sometimes found where the stuffy atmosphere is lighted up with much jewellery. The heavy bracelets and anklets that are worn in some cases must add considerably to the fatigue of the work.



## CHAPTER VIII

## INDUSTRIAL MIGRATION

THE study of the various jats<sup>1</sup> that work in the mills in different areas, and of the extent to which the walls of separation between them are retained is a difficult one. Statements with regard to it are usually vague and are often contradictory. There are broad facts that can be ascertained, and there are many local happenings that may apply only to one mill or to one group of mills.

It is clear that employment in mills tends to break down distinctions. Local conditions, and the comparative numbers of each of the jats that work in the same mill, are responsible for the rapidity with which the barriers go. It seems clear that while modern industry offers emancipation to the outcastes<sup>2</sup> and a settled occupation for those of the criminal tribes who can be admitted to it, it also brings large numbers of caste people into surroundings which tend to lower their standards.<sup>3</sup> It is found that within the same caste and within the highest castes even, very great differences with regard to moral standards are found in neighbouring villages,<sup>4</sup> each village being ruled to a certain extent by its own public opinion.

In Bombay, the great majority of workers come from the Konkan, a district which stretches along the coast of the mainland opposite to and north and south of the island on which the city is built. Many of the immigrants have land of their own or still have links with the family land.

<sup>1</sup> Jat is a word in common use to denote a social group, which may be caste or a tribe.

<sup>2</sup> See p. 204.

<sup>3</sup> See p. 205.

<sup>4</sup> See p. 203.



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Muslim women in some mills work quite apart from Hindus, with a *naikin*<sup>1</sup> of their own. Others mix among the other workers at the winding frames. A large number of them, and of the Muslim men, come from hand-weaving communities, which are considered amongst the most riotous. They may have been resident in Bombay or may have come from Cawnpore or Delhi. In either case they are landless, and poorer as a class, than the Hindus. A young Muslim woman on piece-work, when asked whether she would not stop to eat replied: "No, I have got to work, work, work till I die. I cannot stop. Oh, I am very tired. I am always tired." These women are not in *purdah*, but a curious relique of it may be seen sometimes where a group of markedly dishevelled, untidy women will be pointed out as Muslims. They are said to cultivate this unkempt appearance lest they might be thought to be attempting to attract men other than their husbands. This, however, is an entirely local development, as in other places it is possible to pick out Muslim women by their dignity and by a certain simplicity in the fall of the folds of their *chadars*.

Another local characteristic is that all the Muslim women wind coloured yarn because white is the sign of mourning and they refuse to work on it. This and the fact that colour winding is better paid leads to congestion of workers. The dye adds to the cost of the yarn and waste is more expensive, therefore only the more skilled operatives are employed on it. The rivalry is so great that women would rather stick to the coloured side with only six or eight bobbins than have the full number on white. In white weaving, on the other hand, the women like to have many bobbins; even though they can only manage about twenty-two, they are annoyed if they are reduced to that number, after having had twenty-eight.

There are also groups of *Kolis*, who are Hindu women from the fishing villages on the coast. In many mills in Bombay no untouchables are allowed to work, but in other mills they are employed in the same department as caste

<sup>1</sup> Forewoman.



Hindus and Muslims. There are curious distinctions, however. A group of Mahars<sup>1</sup> working on front rows by themselves on the coloured side in a winding department "would not be tolerated" among grey winders in the same room. Whether the reason of this was that the workers were too eager to stay on the coloured side to risk making difficulties or that the caste Hindus would be less likely to place their food under machines on the coloured side and so did not fear its contamination, or something entirely different, the fact suggests the subtlety of many distinctions. The European manager in this factory, though obviously interested in his workers, did not know that the Mahars were untouchables, and apparently had not heard of the depressed classes. "I'll see who depresses them," he said, as he promised to inquire about the supply of their drinking-water!

In Ahmedabad the workers, though to a much greater extent drawn from the immediate neighbourhood than in Bombay, are much more mixed. There seems to be no preponderating group of one jat that corresponds to the Konkan Mahrattas.

The untouchables are no longer represented by the Mahars but by the Dheds,<sup>2</sup> a scavenger caste lower in the social scale than the Mahars, and by the Chamars or workers in leather, a higher, though still untouchable group, and the Mochis or shoemakers, a sub-group of Chamars. On the other hand, Rajput caste women are found not only working in separate groups on hand-winding but in the ordinary reeling departments. On the winding frames a large number of Costi women are employed. They are the wives of hereditary weavers and come to this north-eastern industrial city with their husbands, from Central India, and even from Madras. These women are said to be much harder workers than the men of their caste and to have the chief share in the management of affairs.

In the Nagpur mills, where the majority of the workers come from the neighbouring villages, the percentage of

<sup>1</sup> One of the large outcaste communities of the Deccan.

<sup>2</sup> An outcaste community in Gujarat.





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Mahars, men and women, to all others is between sixty and sixty-five. It would be interesting to find out whether this fact has in any way made it easier for the employers to introduce and maintain a system of ventilation which would be resented by the workers in many areas.<sup>1</sup>

In Sholapur the workers are drawn chiefly from the city and from the surrounding neighbourhood. The area that may be included in the word neighbourhood varies greatly with the seasons. In the first days of 1921 one mill there was turning away over two hundred people a day who had come from the famine-threatened district around.

Here an interesting experiment is being carried on. Two large encampments of criminal tribes have been opened, and men and women belonging to them are employed in the mills. Only some of the tribes can be allowed to send workers into industrial occupations. Those whose hereditary calling has been that of petty thieves would have too many temptations to recommence their former practices, but forgers and counterfeiters can be safely trusted. Previous attempts were made to employ members of criminal tribes in mills. Under these earlier experiments, in which the control of the workers was given to mill companies, grave abuses occurred,<sup>2</sup> and this method has been entirely abandoned. Now Government arranges with missionary societies for the superintendence of the camps in which the tribes are established. In the one in Sholapur<sup>3</sup> much freedom is allowed and permission is given to members of wandering tribes to leave the settlement and enjoy the liberty of the open country. Those who go usually return of their own accord. If they get into trouble and are arrested the police bring them back. A smaller temporary encampment at Madras under the supervision of the Salvation Army also sends workers to cotton mills.

In Bombay, the larger proportion of workers come from

<sup>1</sup> See Sholapur where a strike was caused by employers' efforts to secure more ventilation and the countless mills where windows are seldom opened.

<sup>2</sup> See *Annual Report on the Working of the Indian Factories Act, 1911, for the Year 1918*, by L. H. Taffs, p. 2.

<sup>3</sup> The camp in Sholapur and another near that city are under the control of the American Marathi Mission.



different parts of the Presidency.<sup>1</sup> In Calcutta, on the other hand, only some ten per cent. are inhabitants of Bengal. The percentage of Bengali women is still smaller in proportion as few Bengalis allow their wives to work in mills. A few village women may be found, but not many. When any considerable number are found, they are usually drawn from the less respectable classes on the outskirts of Calcutta, and are of those whose presence in mill compounds is least desirable. More Bengalis work in the older mills in the south of the city than in the north. In the earlier days of the jute industry, the percentage of local workers was much higher. With the increase of mills it became evident that the demand far exceeded the supply, and that such work did not attract the inhabitants of the districts immediately surrounding Calcutta and Howrah.

There is little surplus of labour in Bengal. The land, for the most part, is fertile and the villagers are home-loving people, little inclined to migrate. Those Bengalis who do leave their homes in search of work usually come from certain less fertile districts.

The mills that line the banks of the Hooghly at intervals for forty miles draw their workers from a much wider area than do the other centres of textile industry. Large numbers of immigrants come from Orissa and Bihar and from the Madras Presidency, from the districts of Jubbulpore and Bilaspur in Central India, from the United Provinces, and from the Punjab. In some mills people from many different localities are mixed indiscriminately. In others there are large groups from one neighbourhood. In one mill, where eight hundred women were employed in the carding department, there were sixty-six Madrasis, fifty-five Bengalis, six Muslims, and six hundred and seventy-three Bilaspuris, while in the same department of another mill, there were six hundred Madrasis. In the latter case the husbands of the women were working as coolies, not necessarily in the mills. In many sack-sewing departments Muslims predominate. Some five hundred of the wives of the Muslim weavers sew sacks in one mill, and

<sup>1</sup> See p. 85.





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In this mill a group of fifty Muslim women work in the batching department. But there are no fixed rules. In another mill in the sack-sewing department, a hundred Muslims work alongside of two hundred Hindus of Sudra sub-castes.

In many mills it is quite impossible to get definite statements about the different jats that are employed. Some necessary arrangements are made about separate supplies of drinking water, and care is taken not to infringe on known customs, but no further interest is taken in the characteristics of the workers. A little experience makes it possible to pick out by sight members of some of the larger groups. The sari or the chadar of the Northern Hindustani covers head and shoulders. Bengali and Madras women are alike in having the head and one shoulder bare, but the latter wear a special type of jewellery and can be identified by the form of nose-ring. Tamil women wear their hair in a loose knot on the right side of the neck.

It is not to be imagined that the workers drawn from these wide areas become permanent town-dwellers. They do so only to a small extent, except in Cawnpore<sup>1</sup> where a settled mill population is growing up. There are regular tides of flow and ebb between country and city. At each turn of the tide some are left behind to settle down in the city and lose all touch with their former homes or, tired of the big industrial centre and content never to return to it, to take up the quiet country life again.

Details vary so greatly that it is not possible to speak in general terms that will include both Bombay and Calcutta, but preliminary considerations that are common to both may be touched on. It is necessary to recall to mind that there are many districts in India that cannot support all the population which under present methods is needed to cultivate the ground. Whether under better methods the land would yield enough for all whose labour it requires, and for their families, is a question, the answer to which would probably vary greatly in different districts,

<sup>1</sup> In the smaller centres such as Beawar, Broach, and many others, the fluctuation is slight as a large majority of the workers come from the near neighbourhood.



According to the quality of the soil, and the rainfall or possibilities of irrigation.<sup>1</sup> As things are at present, conditions tend to disperse a proportion of agricultural workers at certain seasons and to attract them again when their labour is needed in the fields.

The fact that the land and the link with it is so important a factor in Indian life and thought, accentuates the tendency to return. If a family permanently leaves the country district the link is broken and the claim to a share in the heritage lapses. Thus members of families come and go. They take with them when they return to the mofussil,<sup>2</sup> not only labour power for agriculture, but money to buy seed and so to be independent of the money-lenders, and sometimes even money to pay off a father's debts, for it is more common to find men ready to take the responsibility for clearing off a father's debt than eager to keep clear of incurring one themselves or determined to pay it off if they have already done so. By leaving wife and children on the land, and by returning to it at intervals himself, the mill worker retains his hold on his ancestral fields.

As conditions are at present in the crowded mill areas, this frequent migration to the country is a great benefit to the health of the workers. On the other hand, it tends to lower social standards and has a disintegrating effect on family life.<sup>3</sup> If the mill population became a settled one, the men to a far greater extent than at present would take their families with them. As things are there is no adequate accommodation to which to bring them. There is not even accommodation for those who are already there. The most serious problems connected with the effect of labour conditions on moral standards arise from this division of families.<sup>4</sup> The breaking-up of homes in a country where family life bulks so largely in the civilization cannot but bring evil results with it. There are different moral standards in India from those acknowledged in Europe. A woman may be a wife though she is not the only one, but the relations between men and women that are brought about by the influx into cities of immense

<sup>1</sup> See p. 28.

<sup>2</sup> Rural district.

<sup>3</sup> See p. 203.

<sup>4</sup> See p. 206.



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numbers of men are not in accordance with Indian standards of morality.<sup>1</sup> This affects the lives of others besides those who work in mills. The same questions arise in a greater or less degree in connection with domestic service, postal service, police service, and other occupations.

There is no indentured labour in factories.<sup>2</sup> As a rule, those who wish employment come of their own accord and present themselves at the mill gate. Formerly contractors went to likely areas and gathered new workers,<sup>3</sup> but now it is the workers themselves who attract recruits by their stories of money-wages and of city life, which allure others to accompany them.

The difficulties that the managements have to face in working with a fluctuating population can be readily understood. The fact that employers, except in famine time, very generally need more workers than are available, adds to the manager's difficulties, for the workers are not afraid of unemployment, and many drift about from mill to mill. There is no security that the worker returning from harvesting operations will come back to the mill he left. Good conditions will help to bring him, but a difficult foreman or some unimportant casual happening may lead him to seek employment elsewhere. The difficulties of the organizers of industry are often mentioned and are very real. Perhaps one does not hear so much of the obvious fact that the crops grown on the land owned by the workers act as a subsidy to wages.

The periodical migrations make it difficult to ascertain facts with regard to the life-history of individuals or families. They also militate against permanent organization amongst the workers.

The strip of land on the sea coast opposite the island on which Bombay is built and stretching south for some considerable distance is not a fertile one and its proximity to the city encourages large numbers of its population to seek their fortunes in the mills. There is no line of railway along the shore. The result is that the greater

<sup>1</sup> See p. 208.

<sup>2</sup> Efforts were made to secure this in former days.

<sup>3</sup> See p. 106.



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number of immigrants to the mills in Bombay come by coasting steamers. The approach to Bombay, whether from the Indian Ocean or from the coast, is singularly beautiful. The docks are at the south end of the island on the shoreward side. Very few mills are found in the narrow tongue of land that separates the harbour from the bay across which Bombay looks out to the west. The mill area is away to the north, hidden for the most part by the slopes of Malabar Hill which bound the bay on that side. It is not by the open esplanades, past the gardens, the public buildings, and the private houses that face the wide circle of the bay that the country folk, fresh from the disturbing experiences of many hours of voyaging, closely packed on the deck of the coasting vessel, make their way to the congested lanes and courts behind the main northern thoroughfares, where they may find house room; but through narrow, busy, back streets, where east and west crowd each other closely, where an occasional motor-car opens a way for itself through the solid mass of foot and bullock traffic that closes again immediately.

The simplicity of the voyage to Bombay and the strength of the motives that have already been discussed, encourage continual migration. Some of those who come settle down in the city and lose all touch with their home base. They are usually people who have no property in land and no near relatives in the country, and who have married in Bombay. Ten per cent. has been suggested as an approximation to the proportion who never return to their former homes. But while few stay permanently in the city there are many who never again settle in the country to make their home in it. The life of the city in India, as elsewhere, tends to make village surroundings unsatisfying. The continuity has been broken; the wanderers cannot find their places again and tastes and desires have been created which draw them back to the industrial areas. There are exceptions to this. There are those for whom the country life retains its charm who work for a few years in the city and then leave it for ever. Others return home to die. There is much discussion with regard





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to the prevalence of consumption and of the effects of mill life on its increase. There are no data from which to make valid judgments, but there seems to be little doubt that a considerable proportion of those who return ill from the city, not necessarily from mills, are suffering from tuberculosis. Malarial fever is of such common occurrence that the fever of tuberculosis is often supposed to be malarial and the cough is thought of as an accidental symptom. It is seldom possible to trace individuals, as, in most mills, rolls of workers are imperfect if not entirely lacking.<sup>1</sup> The great bulk of the immigrants move backwards and forwards. Thousands return to the Ratnagiri<sup>2</sup> district, when the rain comes, and stay for the four months that include harvest and seed-time, returning for the eight dry months from October to May. Others go for seed-time only, fitting in with friends or relations from the same neighbourhood who go for harvest.

As April and May are the latest months in the year in which ginning is done, it is evident that June is a most inconvenient time, from the employers' point of view, for a general exodus, and it is natural that managers should hope for a time when the children, brought up in industrial districts, will become regular city dwellers. At present, as has been noted, there is no certainty that those who go to the country will return to the mill in which they worked before. Some mills seem specially fortunate in this respect and workers can be found who have been sixty years in one mill. There are managers who take trouble to encourage family groups, and when this is done successfully the workers as a whole tend to return to the mill from which they went on holiday.

The railway line that runs north from Kolhapur, and the Bombay Madras line with which it unites, gather groups of immigrants from certain infertile regions in the Deccan and from the Northern Maratha country and these with smaller groups from greater distances and with fisher folk from the villages unite with the crowds that reach Bombay from Ratnagiri,<sup>2</sup> by steamer, to form the

<sup>1</sup> See "Labour Records in Factories," by G. M. Broughton, M.A., O.B.E. *Journal of Indian Industries and Labour*, vol. ii, part i, p. 64.

<sup>2</sup> Ratnagiri is the name of a town and district in the Konkan.



Industrial population. But all this only gives a general picture. In order to gain the faintest understanding of what the migration means to the individual, it is necessary to picture the vicissitudes that await the countryman on his first arrival in Bombay. If he disembarks, as he may well do, with a group of relations or friends, he may lodge at first with some of them. This will mean in most cases little more than a corner of a small dark room in which he may leave, if he cares to risk them, any possessions he has brought with him, and to which he will return to share the morning and evening meals. He will be expected, except in case of illness and possibly during the rains, to sleep out of doors. If he has a mat he will spread it just anywhere, on the pavement, on the step of a public building, on any flat surface large enough to receive his body and, if a pavement, wide enough to let the traffic go by without interfering with him. When his place is chosen he covers himself entirely with a greyish cloth, so that head, feet, limbs, are all swathed in this one long sheet. Sleep seems to come easily, or if it does not, the Indian waits in stillness for it, for, to the late passer-by, these shrouded figures retain a rigidity like that of death.

The work to which the stranger goes will depend on many chances, but even if he enters the city as one of a group of village companions, he will find himself in perplexingly new surroundings. These cannot be detailed here, but some may be suggested to be followed up later. The man who has been accustomed to long hours in the quiet of the country, broken by the cheerful clamour of the market or the festival, finds himself caught within great walls and stupefied by the clang and whirr of machinery. He who has been accustomed to conform to usages which, though arbitrary and unreasonable at times, were yet in line with his social habits and were received from those whom he had known all his life, now finds himself ordered by complete strangers to do things he does not understand and stormed at or cuffed if he misunderstands or disobeys. Instead of the meal, however poor, cooked by his wife, and ready for him in his





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hut or brought to the fields, he has now to depend on a stranger's cooking and he has no money with which to pay for it, for it will be three, four, or six weeks before he receives any wages.

But it is not only at times when large groups migrate to Bombay that new workers come. The pressure of scarcity drives men thitherward all through the eight months of dry weather, and if the new-comer does not know where his connections live, or has none to whom he cares to go, he is in a still worse plight. The overcrowding of Bombay has been referred to already. Even if there were rooms to spare, the immigrant cannot pay rent for them. He will have to find his way to a house kept, it may be, by a foreman's wife. There, or at a relation's house, the charges are heavy when the coarseness of the food that is given is considered. Twelve to fifteen rupees a month seems not uncommon for board that includes only the cheaper forms of food and excludes milk, and ghi, which are such necessary elements in the otherwise vegetarian diet of the Indian.<sup>1</sup> The staleness and dreariness of such food tempts the workers to go to liquor shops and to small non-resident hotels for meals where the food served, though spicier, is less sound, and where the habit of drinking tadi<sup>2</sup> is commenced or strengthened.

Meanwhile, during the first month, when no wages are received the worker is running up a debt, additional, it may be, to one in the country, and when the long-deferred pay day at last comes, there may scarcely be enough to keep him during the coming month after the interest on his new debt is paid. By this time his wife in the village home is looking eagerly for money from her husband. Even if after the first two months he is able to send her a little the sum seems very small compared to her hopes. It may be that her relations make her feel uncomfortable when she has not more to give towards the common income and, at last, she follows her husband, greatly venturing, and, in many cases, leaving her children behind. If the lot of a man renting only a corner of a room ten feet by ten feet is trying, that of his wife is far

<sup>1</sup> There is no absolute rule. Certain castes eat fish: others mutton.

<sup>2</sup> A drink made from the juice of certain species of palm.



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more so, for unless there happens to be a covered verandah it is not customary<sup>1</sup> for her to sleep out of doors in the city. Very soon she finds out for herself how dear bazar food is and how short a way money goes in the new surroundings. Soon she finds her way to the mill. If her husband has kept free or comparatively free from temptations to drink and gamble, the combined incomes will leave a margin to send home that may even help in the general demands of the family group as well as maintain their own children. If not, the children may very possibly be brought to Bombay with them after their first seasonal return to their home.

There are definite and important differences in the problems raised by migration in the Calcutta area. There is a group of mills to the east of the city and another group across the River Hooghly in Howrah. The other mills are scattered either singly or in groups at intervals along the course of the river for between twenty and thirty miles north, and twelve miles to the south-east. It is natural that in the mills that occupy isolated positions the workers are sometimes drawn very largely from one neighbourhood or from one jat. But while this is undoubtedly the case, the industrial population, as a whole, is drawn from a much wider area, from a larger number of different social groups, and from much longer distances than the majority of those who occupy a similar position in Bombay. There is no district near at hand that corresponds to Ratnagiri on the west. Owing to these facts there are people of more deeply differing standards crowded up against each other round the jute factories. And as each group unit is confronted with a larger number of other group units there is added difficulty for those whose home communities upheld a superior social order in keeping true to their customs even so far as it would be possible in the new surroundings.

The greater distances tend to discourage annual visits to the country. The worker frequently stays in the city for a period of years, after which he returns home and

<sup>1</sup> In great heat women sometimes sleep on pavements out of doors, but this seems to be unusual.





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remains there permanently, or at any rate, until scarcity again drives him to the mill. The distance, too, makes it more difficult for the wife and family to accompany or follow the husband and father, and in many cases, especially amongst the Punjabis and the Muslims, the men of the families come alone. The actual problem of accommodation is not so desperate as it is in Bombay, but the social problems are more complicated.

In spite of the difficulty and expense of long railway journeys there is a very great deal of seasonal migration in Calcutta. April, May, and June are the months when there is apt to be a shortage and when any temporary dissatisfaction will be followed by an exodus. In April and May the heat is oppressive and work in the close atmosphere of the mills becomes specially burdensome. As the jute harvest is in August the mills may be working on short time in the early summer, and the smaller wages received encourage those who are hesitating to join their companions who trek for the country.

Considerable sums of money are sent by postal orders to the families and relations left in the mofussil. These sums are occasionally referred to as the savings of the workers, and are quoted to prove that wages are more than sufficient. This is an entire misrepresentation. No one would think of speaking of the money which a member of the I.C.S. sends to a family in England as savings, and it is as misleading to speak so of the money sent to the Indian villages. Doubtless some proportion of wages is saved, but it would be almost safe to say that none ought to be, and that it is only the slowness with which education progresses and the extreme difficulty of raising standards even to the height of bare efficiency that makes it possible.

The isolated unit arriving in Calcutta at one of the two great railway termini that touch the city on east and west is in much less difficulty about finding dwelling room; but on the other hand he is more likely to find himself not only amongst strangers but amongst those who are strangers to all the details of his habits and customs,



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He not only do not know his language, but with whom he may have no common language, for Hindustani, the everyday phrases of which are understood by large numbers throughout Northern and Central India, is almost an unknown tongue to the Madrasi.





## CHAPTER IX

## THE MANAGEMENT AND SUPPLY OF LABOUR

A LARGE part of the cotton industry is in the hands of Indian firms and individual proprietors. The British firms that have no Indian representatives on the directorate are few. The jute mills are almost entirely in the hands of Europeans, principally Scots.<sup>1</sup>

There is diversity in the composition of the external management in cotton mills. In the majority of cases there are boards of directors to whom the managers at the mills are directly responsible, and agencies to which the commercial side of the business is entrusted. Occasionally the latter firms not only attend to the commercial side, but under the name of managing agents, or of secretaries and treasurers, intervene between the board of directors and the manager. Sometimes, where this is not the case, there is a secretary at the mill as well as a manager. A large number of enterprises, however, are in private ownership. The exact line between this and the former is difficult to draw, as joint proprietors or partners may denote something not very different from a small board of directors. The large number of ginning factories are in private ownership.

In the jute industry, on the other hand, mills, with only two or three exceptions, while under the control of boards of directors, are run by managing agents. It is noticeable that the same groups of names of directors occur again and again in different mills, with perhaps in the case of each separate mill one name or two added. Thus in 1920, in the directorate of thirty-six mills, there

<sup>1</sup> There is at least one large American firm.



are three names commonly, but not always, found together, of which one occurs fourteen times and the other two eleven times each. There are only two or three jute mills owned and run by Indians; occasionally an Indian name is found on the directorate of a mill otherwise managed by Europeans.

A similar tendency to gather control of industry within a small circle is found when the names of managing firms are examined. In the same year one firm acted as managing agent for nine jute mills, four tea gardens, one oil factory, and one fire-brick and pottery factory, and other firms for nine jute mills, two saw mills, two sugar factories, for a fire-clay and silica works, for a graphite company, for a mica works, and for a lac factory. In mills so run the resident manager is responsible to the managing agents, and they to the directors.

Both in the cotton industry and in the jute, the manager is assisted by a varying number of assistant managers, each of whom is responsible for a department. Sometimes the general manager, besides having control of the working of the mill, is also departmental manager over one department. Under this group of managers there are the babus, or clerks, who check work done and pay wages, and the large and important body of control composed of the foremen<sup>1</sup> and forewomen,<sup>2</sup> of whom it will often be more convenient to write under the names used in India, because these vary in different localities and so suggest the place to which reference is being made. It is impossible to get the full content of the Indian terms into a word that is familiarly used for a clearly defined position in British industry.

In the cotton mills of Bombay the words used are jobber for the man, and naikin for the woman. In cotton mills in other districts these words alternate with mukadam and mukadamin. In ginning factories contractor jobber or mukadam is used.\* In jute mills, where there are seldom, if ever, forewomen, in spite of the large numbers of

<sup>1</sup> When a general term is used "overseers" seems best as that is not linked on to so defined a meaning as "foremen."

<sup>2</sup> There are forewomen in cotton mills but not in jute mills.





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Maggies<sup>1</sup> employed, the word for the men in charge of the various groups of workers is sirdar.

Though the titles are different, the powers and privileges are similar, with this modification, that the Calcutta sirdar has probably more influence than is usually wielded elsewhere, because in so many cases the managers and assistant managers under whom he works are European. Even if they have acquired a certain knowledge of Bengali and Hindustani, there are still four or five other languages which it would be necessary for them to know in order to be able to talk freely with all their workers. The necessary frequency of furloughs and the early age at which many European managers retire add to the strength of the body of sirdars as a wall of separation between the management and the workers. Men who on their first arrival are eager to understand, and if it might be to secure better conditions for those whose work they direct, grow accustomed to accept as inevitable things they cannot change, and if later on they find themselves in positions of authority they may retain their kindly feelings towards the labourer, but only in rare cases are they inclined to agitate on behalf of the latter. They occupy a position strictly hemmed in on both sides.

It is impossible to generalize about their relationships with the workers. Some of those whose outward manner is most domineering yet retain considerable human touch with individuals and groups, especially with women and children. In many cases groups of workers gather round to assist in answering the questions a manager may put to the overseers in translating for a visitor, and there is a hubbub of many answers all shouted together, and a vision of gesticulations and laughter. This same eagerness to be in whatever is going on makes it quite impossible to get photographs of workers within mills even when the machinery is stopped for that purpose. The machines are left and the immediate foreground is a mass of laughing faces and pushing figures, till at last, in despair of getting any quiet moment, the stop is pressed and the film is sacrificed! In some mills the relationship between the

<sup>1</sup> Local name for women workers in jute factories.



Manager and the little children is a delightfully personal one. Sometimes friendliness accompanies a coercive manner. The same man who gripped a lad under his chin, and threw him aside with a look as of utter amazement that anyone should dare to be in his way, laughed and chaffed with other workers, especially with groups of women, and is famed for his power of managing labour. Another, who seemed to be on specially good relations with his workers throughout the three mills for which he was manager, was consistently courteous to all. More than once, as he led the way through the compounds, little girls ran up to him and slipped a hand into his for a few steps and then fell back again. He had made a study of one branch of Eastern culture, and had spent his leisure in trying to understand something of the history of the people. One manager had the habit of giving each baby a small coin. In watching the reception it got, it was noticeable how soon the sense of the desirability of money was roused in the children. The gift seemed to be only for those who were still closely dependent on their mothers, and who, if they could walk at all, had only just reached that stage of development. Yet only one showed indifference to the pice.<sup>1</sup> His little face, dulled in expression, probably by fever, showed entire indifference, as he grasped his drinking vessel tighter and paid no attention to the offered gift. In strong contrast to him, a tiny girl began to stretch out her hand, then, realizing that it was already full of fragments of sugar cane, and that somehow things would not work that way, spread the fingers wide, scattering the fibres on all sides, and grasped the coin. She had already showed a very clear perception of how to attain a desired end. When the manager, who had lifted her on his arm, tried to set her back on the iron ledge on which she had been sitting, her little body stiffened itself straight, in graphic protest, and it was only when her attention was distracted by the coin that she consented to be set down again. With all the kindness, it is rather sad to think of the creation of so early a knowledge of the possibilities of money

<sup>1</sup> About one farthing.





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and, from another point of view, still more tragic to think that so small a sum should create the evident eagerness on the part of the mothers that their children should not be overlooked.

Whether the manager be European or Indian, his position, unless the mill be a small one, is very onerous. The hours, regulated for the workers, and the weekly holiday they enjoy, are not necessarily shared by him. Where a day-shift system is in operation, he and his assistants are responsible for the whole time covered by the double relay of workers, and when repairs have to be undertaken in holiday time, it is often at his own risk that he is absent. As one put it: "If an accident happened [during repair work] and I was not there, I would be dismissed." In many areas, too, it is exceptionally difficult for a manager to get an annual holiday, as the season at which it is most needed coincides with the time when labour is scarcest in the mills.

It is not difficult to realize the kind of pressure that is brought to bear on the manager to increase output and to reduce expenditure. In his effort to secure these ends he is confronted with the sirdar or jobber.

The importance of the latter in the whole conduct of mill operations and the vital difference between his position and functions, and those of a British foreman, can scarcely be too strongly emphasized. He stands between the employer and the employed. In many cases he is still an absolute wall of partition, and greatly delays reforms that might otherwise be brought about. From the manager's point of view, it is only through him that workers can be secured. If the employer or the manager went to his mill gates, or to the coolie labour bazar, and asked for workers, he would be received with laughter. At present he must have this body of men to engage his labour and to control it in the mills. The smooth running of the departments and the regular output depends on them, and to a considerable extent their remaining in the mills depends on the manager's non-interference.

From the worker's point of view, the presence of the sirdar is even more inevitable than from the employer's.



Long-established custom gives him his pre-eminence. For it is not only in modern industry that he is found.

Wherever there is group employment there is a leader chosen who negotiates for the group. At the railway station a glance round the circle of coolies who have carried and stowed away the traveller's luggage is at once answered, not only by the stepping forward of the one who claims to be head, but also by the looks and gestures of the others who fall back. The same occurs in the case of rickshaw runners. At the end of the ride three fall back, either in fact, or in attitude, and the fourth stands out. He is sirdar on a small scale. He receives the payment for all and engages for all for future work.

The story is told of a group of workers in Calcutta engaged to cut a plot of grass. Two hours passed and the workers were still seen sitting on the grass. The reply to the inquiry why they had not begun to work, was that they were choosing a sirdar. Even for this temporary and casual piece of work the need of a leader was felt, and the choosing of him was a weighty matter. The sirdar stands, in his crude way, both for the interests of the employer and for those of the labourer. It is his part to see that an adequate amount of work is done and to minimize as far as possible the fluctuations in the supply of labour. From the worker's point of view, he is necessary, not only as a protector of his rights against vague, unknown powers, but also as a security against arbitrary dismissal. In many cases he is oppressive, but he is so much an institution of the country that the labourer scarcely understands how work could be carried on without him.

In earlier days, when the mills were less widely known and when travelling was less usual among the poorer people of India, contractors went to the outlying districts, especially to areas where they knew there was over-population, and secured workers for the mills. This method is unnecessary now in connection with mill work, though in some Calcutta mills it was used recently for the Madras area. The Madrasis were said to have less initiative and to be unused to travelling alone, and





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therefore needed personal recruiting after it had ceased to be used for other jats. Very strenuous recruiting is still going on, apparently with serious abuses, in connection with mines in the Santal district. But although recruiting is no longer necessary in mills, the overseer is still the man who secures the workers. When labourers are scarce in the mills during seed-time and harvest, it would be useless to attempt to bring the cultivators from their fields. During the rest of the year the news of the wages to be had in the cities travels from group to group, and those who have gone off to the country bring back with them groups of friends and relations. Where a new mill opens, news of it spreads and companies of would-be workers crowd to its gates or linger in the neighbouring bazars.

In large towns there are coolie labour bazars. Spaces for these are found at sudden widenings in important thoroughfares or in recesses. In these, groups of men stand about and a row of women squat close to the wall. Mukadams move from group to group, and a steady line of labourers passes along single file to work. If the mill gates and the coolie bazar do not give all the workers that are needed, there are many ways of letting the news of vacancies spread. In some cities workers are systematically beguiled from one mill to another.<sup>1</sup> In a much larger number of cases a hint to a villager, when he is leaving for home, will be enough to induce him to bring back others with him on his return. Though the need for workers may be urgent, the overseer will not publish the fact, but will let it get round indirectly that a few more employes might be taken on.

The custom of dasturi or unacknowledged commission, to which reference has been made, now comes into full operation. It is no new thing to the workers, and they are ready to fall in with it. Have they not paid their pice to policemen for permission to drive their bullocks through a gate or across a bridge, and given an anna, besides the fare, for their railway ticket, only to find

<sup>1</sup> This fact frequently acts as a deterrent to employers who are considering the wisdom of building houses for their employes.



perhaps that the receiver has pocketed not only the anna but also the difference between the cost of the journey of a hundred miles which they contemplated and the price of the ticket to a station a dozen miles from their starting-place at which they find themselves ejected?

When the applicants come, the sirdar is not sure that he has anything for them, or that they will be able to do the work if he has. He will consider it. Of course, they will need to pay him for it. Coins pass. They are not enough. More follow. It is the usual custom for workers to pay a certain sum to the overseer in whose department they are hired to work for their employment there; but the system of exaction does not cease with this. It is in many cases a continuous one, lasting as long as the labourer is in employment. The payment of the initial sum agreed on for leave to work is followed by the demand for a regular sum each pay-day. A bargain is struck, and the employé commences work on these terms. In one case it was estimated that a sirdar's wage was from fifty to sixty rupees a month, while his perquisites, if one may call by that name the amazing toll of bakshish he gathered in, amounted to two hundred or three hundred rupees a month.

Usually the management feels that it must leave this alone; it is exceedingly difficult to alter, and, as the workpeople are entirely dependent on the sirdars and babus for information about the employers, interference, in most cases, would result in the sudden vanishing of all the employés. It is not overseers alone who levy dasturi. Pay-clerks, too, are known to reap harvests of this kind. One in a sack-sewing department was accused anonymously of taking such payments from the workers. A European in that department was deputed to pay wages, but the complaints still continued. The clerk was promoted into the weaving department, where he had a higher salary. Wages in the sack-sewing department were paid once a week, on Sunday morning. After this weekly payment had been made, there was a stream of workers from the shed to the house of the babu to give him the



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accustomed dasturi, although he had been removed from that department altogether.

Another method of oppression on the part of overseers is that of selling the better-paid posts, such as sub-sirdarships, not necessarily to the men best fitted to do the work, but to those from whom the highest bribes can be exacted. Here again the manager knows what is going on, but he is still further hampered if he attempts to interfere by the fact that he can prove nothing. Usually it is only when the sub-sirdar is dismissed (probably by the sirdar from whom he bought the appointment) that he complains of having had to pay to get the post. If the management calls the sirdar in question about it, he asks: "Why does the sub-sirdar complain now? For nine months (or for nine years) he has worked in the mill, yet he only speaks when he is dismissed." Thus the sirdar has the other in his power.

The workers who come to the mills from the country are usually absolutely poor. Sometimes, instead of letting them go to moneylenders, the overseers advance money to them on their wages, or even lend them small amounts. They may charge a lower nominal interest than the bania<sup>1</sup> would, but, owing to the illiteracy of the worker, he is entirely in their power. It is quite impossible for the new-comer to calculate how long it will take him to work off a debt of this kind, complicated by the interest that will have to be allowed on it, and he is often cheated of a considerable part of his pay. His only redress is to move off to another mill, but ignorant as he is of the ways of towns, and easily intimidated by threats, and with his constitutional reverence for the mukadam as mukadam, he is very unlikely to have the courage to leave one mill and go to another when there is a debt left behind him in the first.

While women workers share with men the burden imposed by the payments to the overseers, they are specially liable to be oppressed by them. Opportunities for the display of favouritism are plentiful. Even the unenlightened visitor may notice examples of it. In

<sup>1</sup> Moneylender.



one mill a brilliant yellow sari, very fresh and clean, attracted attention to a woman at work on a machine on which it was usual to employ men. It turned out that she was a relation of the sirdar, and therefore was given a man's place and received a man's pay. She had two men assisting her on less well-paid parts of the work.

Widows are apt to be more oppressed than others, as they have no one to stand up for them. The fact that, owing to the inauspiciousness of their presence, other workers often dislike to work along with them, makes them fear the risk of unemployment so much that they will not readily complain of ill-usage. At times the attentions of the sirdar prove as heavy a burden as his ill-will. In countless ways he may take advantage of the ignorance and of the economic weakness of the woman worker.

A similar abuse of power is found in mills with regard to half-time workers. Boys are bribed by a few pice to appear and receive wages for work they have not done. The wages, less the price, are promptly handed over to the sirdar, who has rushed, say, twelve boys through the work allotted to sixteen. This can only be done when labour is plentiful. When it is difficult to get half-timers, he cannot afford to risk being short-handed.

It is not easy to prove that physical violence is used by the overseers, but it seems probable that there is a certain amount of it. The eagerness of managers to show off elaborate processes, to see the working of which machinery must be stopped or opened, and the desire often shown to explain carefully worked out shift systems, give the onlooker the opportunity of watching the hustling, hectoring treatment of the workers, both men and women, by the overseers. All this is taken very quietly for the most part, but a sudden turn in a workshop will sometimes bring the intruders on a quarrel where the jobber's voice is answered by voices quite as loud and irate as his own.

In cotton mills it is usual to have women overseers in the departments in which women work. Their power, the principle on which they are appointed, and their wages,



differ very greatly in different localities. In certain mills in Bombay it is difficult to get women to accept the position of naikin, because it is not counted respectable. It is difficult to find out how far the reasons alleged for this attitude are reliable. It is said that naikins are usually women of low character, and that in some cases they retain their power and strengthen their position with officials by leading girls astray. This accusation is sometimes flatly denied, sometimes acknowledged as having been true some time ago, but not now. Others who entirely deny any knowledge of this allow that the bad name is to some extent deserved, and suggest that as the naikin has more money, wears better clothes, and much jewellery, she naturally attracts attention. Even where no actual charge is made against the character of the naikins, it is admitted that good workers are unwilling to accept the position though the pay is undoubtedly much better than that of the ordinary workers. Sometimes the choice of naikins is made from among the steady, old women who have been twenty or thirty years in the same mill. Sometimes good workers are selected. The wages vary from nineteen rupees a month in a mill in a small town to ninety in a great city mill. This latter sum seems to be quite unusual, however, and the naikin evidently realized it, as she did not go home as often as the other workers did. She could not be spared easily, and she knew that others would gladly step into her shoes.

In a mill in Ahmedabad, in a department where Muslim women wound warp, a striking-looking mucadamin held sway. Some years before she had been employed in an iron works, earning about ten rupees a month. She came to this cotton mill to work as a coolie, and at a time when there was labour trouble said to the manager: "Make me a mucadamin, and I will bring you forty women." She was installed, and continued to bring many workers. She was a fine-looking woman, tall and graceful. Her former employer, the ironmaster, whom she had recognized as he went through the room, and the manager of the mill were both interested in her force and power



of organization, and in her leap from a wage of ten rupees to one of fifty. In strong contrast to her quick grip of the situation were the ignorance and lethargy of a woman who, when asked during a strike why she was not working, replied: "The Raj<sup>1</sup> has said we must not work."

The power of the naikin is small compared to that of the jobber, but she does not seem to be free from the spirit of oppression,<sup>2</sup> and it is affirmed that when her anger is roused against men who are too strong for her she has been known to hire outsiders to maul her enemies.

In ginning factories the contractor still plays his part, though it is usually possible for him to secure his employes in the near neighbourhood. It is customary to give him a lump sum for the ginning of a given quantity of cotton. Out of that he has to pay his workers. What is over he retains.<sup>3</sup> It is taken for granted that he will avoid breaking the Factory Act in such a way as to be found out, and everything is left in his hands and in those of the overseers.

Because of the urgency of getting cotton ginned rapidly certain concessions were made in the Act of 1911. The prohibition of women's work at night,<sup>4</sup> the limitation of it to eleven hours in one day,<sup>5</sup> the demand that the hours during which each woman was employed should be specified<sup>6</sup> were set aside as far as ginning factories were concerned, and the only proviso substituted was that the number of women employed must be large enough to allow that none should work for more than eleven hours in any one day.<sup>7</sup> It was easy for an inspector to know whether the names on the register would work out so as to give an average of eleven hours of work a day to each, but it was quite impossible for an inspector to know whether all the women actually did work. Relations of the overseers might have had their names on the register, might

<sup>1</sup> Government.

<sup>2</sup> See translation of speech, by Mrs. Sarswatibai Donde, delivered at the All-India Welfare Conference held in Bombay in April 1922.

<sup>3</sup> See p. 124.

<sup>4</sup> Act of 1911, 24 (b).

<sup>5</sup> Act of 1911, 24 (a).

<sup>6</sup> Act of 1911, 26.

<sup>7</sup> Act of 1911, 27.





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have drawn pay, and might never have been near the factory.<sup>1</sup>

An instance of the way in which the contractor method works may be noted from a press in a country town, though the actual work done was on wool, not cotton. In a long shed, unlighted and unventilated, except by the entrance door, wool was lying on the ground in heaps, unbeaten and beaten. The former looked heavy and was in handfuls as it had been clipped, the hairs lying parallel to each other. The beaten was light, took up much more room, and looked cleaner. Throughout the shed, right back into its furthest recesses, there were groups of lads, girls, young women, and children. There was no machinery in the shed, so even the little ones were at work picking out and separating the colours. They worked all day long, and could earn from four to six annas a day. The older workers were breaking up the matted bundles of wool by steadily beating the heaps with narrow bands of iron, which in action looked like slender swords. The scene, as the light fell on the workers near the door, was picturesque, but the conditions, with hair and dust filling the air, especially at a distance from the entrance, were bad. If ventilation had involved strong currents of air, the workers would have been the first to dislike it, as their speed would have been retarded. The question arises whether such work, when it has to be done in bulk, should not be done by machinery. But the reason for introducing the discussion of these conditions here is the fact that these workers were not employed by the proprietor nor by the manager of the factory, and were not in any way under their control,<sup>2</sup> but were sent in by merchants who had bought the wool and whose contractors had employed the workers to prepare it for pressing.

<sup>1</sup> The clause granting these concessions is omitted in the Act as modified up to July 1, 1922.

<sup>2</sup> "The Inspector in Sind reports that factory owners make contracts with contractors for their labour and these contractors are always ready to employ child labour in preference to that of adults. When children are caught at work in a factory, the factory owner usually denies all knowledge of them, and says that he does not pay them."—*Annual Factory Report of the Presidency of Bombay, 1921*, by A. H. Fell.



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The power of the overseer is deeply rooted, but the changes which must eventually shake it are already in operation. Here and there in mills under advanced management works committees are in operation, and though these are as yet very ineffectual, the mere fact that the manager meets representative men and women along with foremen and forewomen, and invites the discussion of grievances and general mill conditions, is a clear sign that the times are changing rapidly.





## CHAPTER X

## WAGES AND METHODS OF PAYMENT

IN the Inspector's report on the working of the Factories Act, in the Bombay Presidency, for 1921, the customary table of wages is omitted, because "it has been found to be incomplete and misleading."<sup>1</sup> This official statement is a suggestive introduction to any study of payments in factories, not only in Bombay, but throughout the cotton and jute industries of the country.

The estimate that ninety per cent. of Indian women work for wages, temporarily or permanently, is difficult to credit, but the fact that it can be seriously asserted emphasizes the importance of the problem. It is acknowledged that wages in the mills are much larger in amount than those that can be earned for unskilled work in other occupations, and it is often taken for granted that the economic position of the workers is raised to a proportionate extent.<sup>2</sup> The latter supposition is open to dispute. The demands of the city dweller are more urgent than those of the villager, and the strain of life is very much greater in the former case, especially on the women. But the mere comparison with country wages is not a satisfying test in a land of which it is admitted that millions of its population are too poor to be able to secure even the bare necessities for maintaining a standard of efficiency.

<sup>1</sup> The further reason was given that the publication of a report on an inquiry into the wages and hours of labour in the cotton mill industry was anticipated. This report by G. Findlay Shirras, Director of the Labour Office, Government of Bombay, has now been published. The returns were secured by the voluntary co-operation of employers, and cover more than eighty per cent. of the workers in cotton mills in the Bombay Presidency. See *Report on an Inquiry into the Wages and Hours of Labour in the Cotton Mill Industry*.

<sup>2</sup> See p. 96.



another test is taken, a different light is thrown on the subject. It is reasonable to suppose that orphanages will be run economically. After many inquiries, it appeared that it had been found impossible to cover the monthly expenditure on food and fire for cooking alone, for little boys for less than four rupees \* for each child. A standard based on this test and demanding no greater expenditure for adults than for children would require twenty-seven rupees a month for a family of six for food and fire alone. When it is recalled that nothing has been allowed for clothes, for religious offerings, for rent, for medicine, for the journey home, some idea of what an adequate efficiency wage would be can be formed. ‡ When the sum thus found is compared with actual wages, it explains the emphasis that prominent leaders of Indian social reform place on the need of women's wages for the support of their families.

Any proposal in favour of higher wages is met by arguments that seem at first sight to have much to support them, but which fail to take account of all the circumstances. The chief amongst these are the lowness of the general standard of living; the small amount of work that can be done by an Indian employé as compared with the amount that can be done by a European owing to the difference of physique; and the fact that in almost all factories there is a great deal of liberty granted both to men and to women to take off time throughout the

\* Six shillings. It is to be noted that this is for a month.

‡ "The average daily wage income needed to provide adequate subsistence for a family of five on a wheat standard must at present be at least Re1.3.0, and on a jowar [millet] standard Re1.0.0.

This subsistence standard cannot at present be fully attained by the labouring classes under existing rates of wages—nor has it been reached since the commencement of the war—as long as there are dependent children or women in the family. To secure it, every member must work without loss of time. "A Subsistence Wage," by Professor H. W. Lyons, Indore Christian College, *Indian Journal of Economics*, vol. iii. part iv, pp. 458-9. In this inquiry the jail standard of food was adopted, as it was also in an inquiry carried out in Madras by the Rev. D. G. M. Leith, which suggests twenty-four rupees a month as the minimum subsistence income for a family of four. See *The Transactions of the Indian Economic Association*, Madras Section, for the year 1920-1. Dr. Dagmar Curjel during her inquiries in Bengal found that a subsistence wage in that district must amount to about seven rupees a month for one adult.





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day besides the hour<sup>1</sup> reserved for food and rest. The inadequacy of the standard of living creates serious difficulties in all social problems, difficulties that are increased by the fact that a low standard has not only been taken for granted, but has been obligatory on certain sections of the labouring people. A result of this is that higher wages are often spent on drink and gambling, instead of on things urgently required. Many efforts to meet the need for education in this direction are already being made, and there is opportunity for those employers who put forward such objections to show their sincerity by expending all that might reasonably be spent in higher wages, on preparatory education, or on the provision of club-rooms, rest-houses, and other alternatives to the tadi shop.

Another claim that wages are adequate is based on the fact that quite often a rise of wages results in fewer days' work on the part of those employed, and that when there are several workers in a household the tendency is for each to do less work rather than for the family to raise its standard of living. The need of widening horizons is not the only answer to this claim. When a subsistence wage can only be earned by working sixty-six hours a week, men and women will work for that length of time until health breaks down, but if they can earn the same wage for forty-eight hours' work, it is most probable that they will no longer work for sixty-six hours, but will fall into the habit of working for some number of hours between the two periods, which will relieve the tension of the first and will at the same time enable them to earn a little more than the former bare subsistence rate. If for the original sixty-six hours they were working beyond their vital energy for less than subsistence the reaction will be all the greater, and the still smaller wage for less labour may rise nearer to the level of subsistence because of the smaller amount of energy put forth.

The argument with regard to the amount of work an Indian can do, as compared with a European, cannot of

<sup>1</sup> Sect. 21, Indian Factories Act, 1911, as modified up to July 1, 1922.



Itself justify present wages. It ignores the human needs of the individual worker. It is true that there is much liberty in coming and going in mills generally, but this, to a great extent, is included in the comparison of the amount of work done by an eastern and by a western, so that it scarcely counts as an added argument, especially as there seems to be quite a possibility that with better nourishment and shorter hours the workers will be able to do more continuous work. At present there is not sufficient evidence on either side, and both points of view are maintained by individuals amongst those who have experimented. So many things have to be taken into account that it is probably impossible to know how far increases in wages have kept pace with the increased cost of living.<sup>1</sup>

It is at least obvious that the scornful way in which demands for higher wages are treated, and the obstinate resistance to them till no choice is left, require justification that has not hitherto been forthcoming.

There has, however, been a very definite rise during the last ten years. If figures are selected for different departments and localities, it is found that the increase since 1914 varies from seventy per cent. to a hundred and thirty per cent. in the large centres. In smaller centres where the wages paid to women at the earlier date were very low, the increase on their wages is greater in comparison to the increase on wages paid to men than in larger industrial areas. Thus in Sholapur wages paid to women have increased by eighty-seven per cent., while those paid to men have increased by eighty-two per cent.; and in the other centres scattered throughout the Bombay Presidency the percentage of increase is a hundred and forty for women and a hundred and twelve for men.

Rates of pay for similar work vary greatly. In Bengal it is possible to find mills situated near each other and under the same management in which the wages for the same work differ. Some accident of situation or of conditions makes the one appeal more to workers than the

<sup>1</sup> See *Wages and Hours of Labour in the Cotton Mill Industry*, by G. Findlay Shirras, Director of the Labour Office, Bombay, p. 19.





other, and wages remain at a lower level in the more popular mill.

A very rough generalization for the years 1920-1 would group the wages paid to the larger number of women in jute mills in Bengal between nine rupees and thirty rupees a month ; those in factories in Bombay between thirteen rupees and thirty-four rupees a month ; and those in Ahmedabad between twelve rupees and thirty rupees.<sup>1</sup>

Not only in mills, but in many other occupations, it is customary to keep back a certain proportion of wages as a security that workers will not suddenly vanish. The fact that there is seldom an adequate supply of labour for modern industry, and the further fact that there are many reasons which tempt those employed in it to leave it, especially at first before they have got accustomed to its conditions, have made this habit of deferred payment almost universal in mills in larger industrial centres. In Bombay, where it is most stringent, it usually entails the postponement of payments till the middle of the month subsequent to the one for which payment is made, and the retaining of a fortnight's wages in hand. Thus, a new worker may be employed for six weeks before he receives any payment whatever, and he then receives wages for four weeks only. Until recently it was common for employes to work for two months before any payment was made. In the smaller centres of the cotton industry the amount of money kept in hand varies and may be the equivalent of ten or twelve days' wages. In the jute mills the same system is in operation, but the delay in payment is less lengthy and the sum kept back is smaller. Wages are paid once a week, and only one week's wage is retained. The disadvantage of this system, especially as it is worked in Bombay, does not consist alone in the danger that new-comers may become hopelessly in debt before they receive payment. The further danger exists that they may unwittingly forfeit the money

<sup>1</sup> These figures are inserted to give a general idea. They can do nothing more. In individual cases wages fall below and rise above the amounts mentioned. The Report referred to on p. 117, note, gives averages only.



held back. It is usually maintained that workers who give due notice that they mean to leave the mill get the money due to them ere they go, or are allowed to count it to their credit on their return; but as the causes that draw them away are often connected with illness, either their own or that of a relative, it may be impossible for them to know a fortnight<sup>1</sup> before they go.<sup>2</sup> Even when they do plan ahead to return home for a wedding or for seed-time or harvest, only a few may realize the wisdom of giving notice two weeks beforehand, and in some cases the mere fact of doing so would make it more difficult to get away, especially for men in busy seasons, as leave may then be refused.<sup>3</sup>

Some managers arrange that steady workers receive the money due to them if they fall ill. There is little doubt, however, that considerable sums of money duly earned fall forfeit, and that the long-deferred payments give opportunities for further exactions on the part of overseers and pay clerks.

In Ahmedabad, owing probably in part to Trade Union influence, men and women who are in the same department receive equal time wages, and those who are on piece-work are paid at the same rate, and in certain cases are said to earn rather more. In jute mills in Bengal also it is usual to find that men and women working on the same machines receive equal wages on time work and an equal rate on piece work. But there seem to be wide differences both with regard to the actual amount of money paid and with regard to the equality or otherwise in this matter of women with men. As it is in these two districts that women are employed in the largest number of different processes, it is in them that comparison is most possible. Occasionally women working on the same

\* In certain mills in Sholapur one month's notice has to be given.

<sup>2</sup> There is a custom of pleading the imaginary illness or death of relatives as an excuse for a holiday. \* This is so openly practised that even in conditions where there is a personal knowledge of the worker, it is often difficult to know whether relation and illness are real or invented, and the fact that this is so lessens the credence given where the statements are true.

<sup>3</sup> Workers are understood to forfeit their held-back wage if they go without leave, but if they are well-known the manager may "stretch a point."





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machines as men receive a rupee or so less per month on the plea that they are allowed more freedom to go and come than the men, who look after their work in their absence. In the reeling department of one mill, where there was a piece rate of payment for each hundred reels, further inducement to steady work was afforded by the fact that if workers earned more than a certain sum the rate of payment was raised by thirteen annas.

The nominal wage paid is by no means an exact guide in estimating the income of the workers, however. Bonuses are given under various headings, and to very different amounts in different localities. Fines are levied in varying degrees, and part-payment in kind is frequent.

The larger bonuses and scarcity allowances are granted in some cases to avoid the necessity for raising wages. It is claimed by the employers that a bonus is an entirely temporary addition which may be cancelled at any time should circumstances change, and that the withdrawal of it must not be considered as a lowering of wage. This distinction is not likely to prevent protests and strikes should any serious curtailment take place without an even more obvious fall in prices, but, owing to the widely spread desire for bakshish, bonuses are probably not so unpopular with the Indian worker as they are in Britain. The same fare given separately as payment and bakshish is much more likely to satisfy the coolie or the rickshaw runner than if it is given in one sum.

The simplest bonus is a monthly one granted in many mills for regular attendance. For this one rupee a month is a common amount, though the sum may be as low as eight annas. In certain mills this bonus is granted although two working days are missed. In others, two days' absence are permitted to women, but not to men. Another modification is to withhold half for one day's absence, and all for two days. Monthly scarcity allowances based on wages and amounting in certain cases to fifty per cent of the wage drawn are found in various mills.

In Bombay, in 1921, the payment of an annual bonus

\* Or even four days.



approximating to the equivalent of one month's wages was sanctioned by the Mill-owners' Association. In Ahmedabad, where the mills were making very high profits, a demand was made that the annual bonus should amount to the equivalent of two months' wages. The employers refused and the matter was referred to arbitration. Pandit Madan Mohan Malaviya,<sup>\*</sup> after consultation with the President of the Mill-owners' Association and with Mahatma Gandhi, together with other representatives of the Employers, and with representatives of Labour, gave the award on October 28, 1921. In it he recommended a compromise which the greater number of employers and employes accepted. By it a maximum bonus of seventy-five rupees was to be granted to all whose monthly wage amounted to sixty rupees or more, while those whose monthly wage amounted to less than sixty rupees were to receive the equivalent of one month's wage and fifteen rupees.

These bonuses are elaborated with reference to the number of months' attendance put in. The fact that eight or nine months is reckoned as entitling a worker to the full bonus is an added proof, were such necessary, of the extent to which annual absences are taken for granted.

An interesting extra bonus is given in some mills at the Diwali festival, which corresponds to the New Year. It is given not to individuals, but to the workers collectively, and consists of a few pice, spent very possibly on the bright paper chains, flowers, and flags that enliven some of the homelier mills then and for some time after the celebration. The workers bring the decorations and arrange them themselves, and the animation that at once appears up and down a workshed when any reference to them is made reminds the visitor of the quick response and consciousness of mutual understanding in spite of barriers experienced in other connections.

The extent to which fines are levied varies greatly. In one mill warning had been given that six rupees would be deducted from the wage of anyone who was found

<sup>\*</sup> Pandit Madan Mohan Malaviya has taken a leading part in the development of Benares Hindu University.





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using undamped bobbins. The threat had caused some improvement, and the penalty had not been levied. This fine comes under the heading of those exacted for intentional spoiling of goods, for which it is customary to exact two or three rupees. Frequently these fines are levied on men in the weaving sheds for weaving too openly with an insufficient number of weft threads to the inch of warp. Sometimes they are imposed for allowing waste to mix with the rovings in the spinning shed. Workers convicted of minor thefts are fined. Those guilty of serious thefts are dismissed. The fines that are most frequently exacted in women's departments are small ones of an anna or so for inattention and slackness. In some well-organized mills the power of exacting fines is retained but is seldom used.

Perplexing questions connected with wages in India centre round the sale of cheap grain and cheap cloth by mills to their workers, and the provision of housing accommodation at low rents, and allowance must be made for the different circumstances<sup>\*</sup> in east and west. Theoretically there is no pressure used to induce workers to purchase grain or cloth, but in some cases the wages are such that it would be impossible for the workers to pay bazar prices in times of scarcity. In the city centres, where wages are higher on the whole, the workers are more independent, and may choose for themselves. It is in country districts that the grain sold by the mill firms is the greatest boon to the workers, but it is also there that, owing to the lack of competition for workers, it is most desirable that nothing should be done to retard the growth of independence.

In order to understand the situation it is necessary to remember that the workers must buy all their food-stuffs in small quantities. The jar in the corner of the hut or the hole dug into its flooring, would not store much even if the money to buy supplies for the future were forthcoming. Prices in the bazars vary greatly, and in times of scarcity run up to prohibitive figures. The mill-owner can arrange to have storage room, and has the

<sup>\*</sup> See p. 40.



knowledge of when to buy. He fixes a retail price which he considers reasonable, and may very probably abide by that price even when it entails an actual money loss, which, however, must in many mills be considered as covered by the lower rate of wages<sup>1</sup> given. In different localities different conditions are made. In one mill the grain is sold on one day in the month, and only workers who have been not more than four days absent<sup>2</sup> in the month are allowed to buy. This rule is absolute, and no allowance is made for sickness. In another mill, workers, from the time they have been three days in the mill, can buy grain up to half the amount of wages due to them. In the latter mill in February 1921, the mill price for rice was exactly half the bazar price. In the former mill, in which regular attendance is compulsory in order to have a right to buy grain, rice, pulse, and millet were sold in the mill, and in January 1921, when the market price for three seers of rice or of millet was two rupees, the mill supplied nine seers of either for the same sum. In the case of pulse the bazar price was one rupee for two and a quarter seers and the mill price was one rupee for four seers.

While the mill leaves the worker free to go to the bazar if the price there falls below mill price, and to return at his will, it is not always easy for the grain sellers to see it in the same light, and, especially in cases where no grain is sold to those who have been absent through illness, serious disabilities may ensue. The grain seller, who is also moneylender, is not unlikely to demand a higher price or a bakshish ere he will deal with the worker who has been accustomed to go elsewhere when he could.

In times of scarcity, like that experienced in many parts of India in 1921, mills that supplied cheap grain were extraordinarily popular. In Sholapur applicants for work from the surrounding district crowded to the mill gates declaring that they did not care how low the wages

<sup>1</sup> The provision of cheap grain is regarded as a justification of the fact that wages are low.

<sup>2</sup> Besides the four stated holidays appointed by the Indian Factories Act as modified up to July 1, 1922, sect. 22. "No person shall be employed in any factory on a Sunday, unless: (a) He has had, or will have a holiday for a whole day on one of the three days immediately preceding or succeeding the Sunday," etc.



were if they only got leave to work and have a right to cheap grain.

Cloth shops do not seem to have met with a similar response. In some of the mills that make dhotis, men get chits<sup>1</sup> to buy these at cash price, and are allowed to choose the ones they prefer in the storeroom; but frequently attempts to open mill cloth stores fail because there is little demand.

In many localities there is urgent need for the supply of food and other things of better quality than those supplied by the local bazar and at more reasonable and more stable prices, but the line of advance would seem to lie in the direction of increased co-operative facilities, and in the encouragement of reliable independent stores, rather than in the introduction of new mill stores.

The arrangements for wages in ginning factories are simple. The contractor who engages the workers is paid fourteen or fifteen annas per bale of cotton ginned, and the smaller the wages and the longer the hours of work, the larger the amount that is left for himself.<sup>2</sup> Except in the case of those who do coolie work as seed-carriers, who may get fourteen rupees a month, the actual amount paid to women varies from seven to ten and a half rupees a month, but seven rupees seems to be the usual sum. Wages are paid by the week or by the day. In some factories one day's wage is kept in hand; in others the week's wage is paid in full. The fact that workers are sometimes paid on Sunday<sup>3</sup> suggests the unwillingness of employers to encroach on the time of a working day and the willingness of workers to break in on their holiday by coming for wages.

<sup>1</sup> Small written papers or cards.

<sup>2</sup> See p. III.

<sup>3</sup> The weekly compulsory holiday is usually given on Sunday in mills and factories, except when a Muslim or Hindu holiday falls within three days of it.



## CHAPTER XI

## CONDITIONS WITHIN MILLS

THE study of the actual conditions within mills opens up an interesting and, on the whole, a hopeful part of the subject in hand. The interest and the hopefulness circle round the facts that in certain areas progress has been made, that inquiries have been set on foot to gain the scientific knowledge which will enable definite standards to be set, and that a great advance is possible, can eventually be insisted on, and can be proved to be an advantage not only to workers, but also to employers from the point of view of efficiency. There are calls for reform in other directions, such as better housing and the raising of standards of living with regard to which the temptation is to fall back with more or less assurance, according to the temperament of the thinker, on education, which may bear an almost wholly nebulous content; but with regard to the needs connected with actual mill premises and working conditions, there are no insuperable difficulties.<sup>1</sup> It is true that no satisfactory reforms will come even here without much definite education, but it is easier to see what kind of education is necessary and to imagine the proofs and persuasions that can be brought to bear on those whose co-operation must be secured.

One of the hopeful signs is that already selected mills stand far above the average in general suitability of buildings, in regulation of temperature, in arrangement of machinery and of lighting. A hurried glance will reveal some of the differences between mill and mill. No one

<sup>1</sup> The greatest perhaps are those connected with humidity and with the preparation and application of size.



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would expect to find conditions as healthy in mills that look like "boxes built round a crowded heap of machinery" as in mills firmly erected and spread over a wide area. But the factors that go to make good conditions are more subtle than any that can be grasped cursorily, and much of the knowledge needed to secure them is not yet tabulated or ascertainable. An interesting proof of this is found in the fact that in one compound a second mill, for which all the experience gained in the first mill was available, showed a poorer health record than the first.<sup>1</sup> The manager, who was specially interested in conditions, was puzzled and disappointed. Local circumstances may have been responsible for the poorer record to some extent, but the occurrence strengthens the belief that further study is urgently needed in order to find out what details in actual construction conduce to health.

There is a broad division between jute mills and cotton mills with regard to structure. The former are spread over large areas in one-storey sheds lit from the roof. The latter vary greatly. In roomy, country areas they may have two storeys only in a small portion of the mill, or may even be one-storey throughout, but, generally speaking, they are built in blocks of several storeys, and light enters by windows in the walls. In both forms of building it is of the utmost importance that a sufficient amount of light should be secured with as little access of the direct rays of the sun to the workers as possible. In order to secure this in the block structure, advice that at first sounds surprising to a westerner, is given: "Mills should be built facing north and south!"<sup>2</sup> During the hottest part of the year the sun's rays are so nearly perpendicular at midday that they do not enter southern windows to anything like the same extent as that to which they enter eastern and western windows at night and

<sup>1</sup> These mills were on the borders of a town in the mofussil, and the less migratory habits of their workers made it possible to estimate health conditions. The absence of records in the great majority of mills adds to the difficulty of forming accurate judgments on the physical results of industry.

<sup>2</sup> See paper by Mr. Terence Maloney, adviser on humidification to the Government of India, submitted to the All-India Welfare Conference, Bombay, April 1922.



messing. If windows face north and south, the sun's rays fall chiefly on the blank end wall to the east, then on the roof, and then on the unbroken western wall. Even allowing for this, the hot air entering from the south is so oppressive that as few windows as possible should be there unless they are provided with cuscus screens,<sup>1</sup> for which a plentiful supply of water is available during the hot season. The disadvantages of having lighting only from the north in block buildings is that the heavy machinery intercepts the passage of air and of light to remote corners, and that any general ventilation of the sheds is rendered almost impossible, unless fans are supplied.

In one-storey buildings, on the other hand, the lighting is frequently arranged on a system which makes the roof like a series of uncurved saw teeth. The sloping line of each tooth rises from south to north, and is roofed, while the short, perpendicular drop is of glass. Thus all the light that is admitted comes from the north. This form of lighting has the great advantage that it throws the light well into the corners of the sheds, though even with it specially large and closely placed machinery may create isolated darkened areas. Another method is to build a flat roof broken at intervals by square or oblong erections with glass sides and ends. This plan does not exclude the sun's rays, but if the roof is high, it secures that they will seldom fall directly on the workers. The effect of the intense heat of the hot season can be further modified by whitewashing walls, roof, and any windows exposed to the sun's rays. But such outside appliances will be of little use unless the actual building is satisfactory. Sometimes walls, and more frequently roofs, are of corrugated iron. The temptations to use metal are not only its durability and the ease with which it can be obtained and placed in position. The tremendous rains of the monsoon make an impervious roof down which water rapidly runs very attractive, and the monkeys, that in many districts make the roofs their playgrounds, find it more difficult to play pitch and toss with metal sheets than with tiles ! But any gain that is won in these

<sup>1</sup> Screens made of grass over which water is allowed to flow.

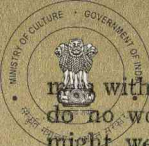




directions seems worse than loss to anyone with imagination who has ever attempted steady work even in Britain on a hot summer day under an iron roof. Even if corrugated iron is not used, the roofing may still be very unsuitable. A thin foundation roof covered with a layer of tiles intercepts but little of the sun's heat. In strongly built mills, where the roofs are flat, reinforced concrete is found to provide a satisfactory roof, especially if it is covered by water during the hottest months. In slighter buildings, whether with flat or with sloping roofs, great advantage is found if a double roof is made with a space of some inches left between the two sections.<sup>1</sup>

Suggestions for protection from the sun's heat lead on to the whole question of ventilation in mills. In spite of the difficulties that are ahead of those who are intent on better conditions in this direction, there is exhilaration in the knowledge of the remarkable success that has been achieved already, and in the thought of those who are steadily experimenting to create standards that can be attained. It has long been realized that a moderate and fairly dry temperature and a regular supply of fresh air are conducive to comfort in work and to the health of the worker. As long as this was the general and somewhat vague conviction, it was natural to argue that if workers did not complain, there was little need to agitate. This argument is heard *ad nauseam* in India to-day. It takes different forms. The fact that the homes are far more close than the mills, the obvious dislike of the workers to open windows, and their fear lest currents of air will break cotton threads are all quoted as proof that there is no need for change. These arguments are all the more difficult to confute because of the uncertainty that exists with regard to the effect heat may have on those whose ancestors have been acclimatized to it. It is clear that Indians can bear a temperature that would incapacitate Europeans, but it is also clear that they suffer from intense heat. The Chinese character for Summer represents a

<sup>1</sup> Mr. Maloney speaks of an instance in which the addition of an under roof of asbestos reduced the heat in the hottest months by an average of seven degrees, increased the year's production by three per cent. and paid the cost of erection in three years.



men with his hands hanging at his side because the farmers do no work in the hottest weeks, and a similar symbol might well be used for the heat of April, May, or June in India. Mills have had to be shut down on this account, and if such an extreme measure has had to be resorted to at times much suffering must have been endured before the necessity for closing was admitted.

But science has proved two further facts with regard to ventilation. The one is that there is a definite and ascertainable ratio between the condition of the air and the efficiency of the worker who breathes it, and the other is that fresh air is not adequate unless it be in motion and induces changes in the temperature of the body. This latter discovery, associated with the name of Professor Hill Leonard, has had a revolutionary effect, and systems of ventilation previously approved in schools and other large buildings in the west, by which fresh air was admitted to rooms and stale air withdrawn with the least possible movement and change of temperature, are now condemned. While their failure would naturally be assumed by those who are convinced of the need of motion in the air, it has also been proved over and over again by the lack of attention and the dulled intelligence of classes taught in the steadier atmospheres.

Proof of the difference of efficiency in work done in well and ill-ventilated mills in India has already been secured on a small scale. Experiments that have been made show a fall in efficiency during the hot weather in an ill-ventilated weaving shed as reaching twenty per cent., while that in a well-ventilated shed was less than seven per cent. The general assumption seems to be clearly proved, but it is still difficult to secure detailed statistics owing to the numbers involved, and to the fact that it is not easy to find sheds that are sufficiently similar in other respects to make comparison useful.

In Britain, when the value of air in motion is considered, it is natural to think at once of open windows or of ventilators. The perplexities surrounding the question in India cannot be grasped by a westerner till it is realized that for a great part of the year not the slightest breath



of wind can be felt during the day.<sup>1</sup> Through blazing sunshine and through the steaming intervals in monsoon rains, the air hangs motionless except for the action on it within the mills of the whirling machinery which adds greatly to its heat and is too localized to increase its general circulation to any great extent. There is no cure for this except by the generous use of punkahs or electric fans. In private houses it is found that work that is impossible in still air can be done under a fan even when no fresh air is introduced. The result of the air in motion is enough to set free energies otherwise paralysed. In the instances in which fans have been installed in factories with few exceptions<sup>2</sup> the numbers are quite inadequate, and the result negligible. In one case where two fans were provided in a long, airless shed, the effect was unnoticeable twelve feet away. The common attitude towards the proposal to introduce electric fans may be gathered from the remark of a manager who had been making special efforts to improve ventilation in overheated departments in his mill. His answer to a tentative suggestion was: "We would be dismissed if we asked for electric fans!" There are, however, compromises that can be made, and here and there these are found in operation. Metal plates attached to overhead shafting and moving with the revolution of the shaft cost little. Broad canvas sheets so hung that they swing free, may be placed on overhead bars with little addition to the mechanical structure. Circular metal fans also worked from the central engine can be erected in places where the atmosphere is specially stagnant. Such experiments are already in operation, but owing to the fact that there is little public opinion on the subject, the knowledge of them does not spread rapidly. Some individual weavers secure moving currents of air for themselves by improvising small fans attached to the front of their looms. These

<sup>1</sup> The evening and night winds that often spring up do not affect mid-day conditions, especially as employers are reluctant to have windows left open during the night for fear of thieves.

<sup>2</sup> In Nagpur a system of ventilation and humidification which keeps the mills cooler than the air outside during the dry months of the year is in operation. The initial expenses of installing this system are heavy but it is said to be simple and little liable to go out of order.



hopeful signs, but their occurrence is rare. In a very large number of mills there are no appliances for securing the introduction of fresh air in still weather, nor for obtaining movement in stagnant air. In others, a few inadequate fans are seen, not in use, reserved for hot weather (although at the moment the atmosphere may be stifling), and sometimes so loaded with fluff and debris that it is difficult to imagine them in operation at all.

One great obstacle in the way of advance in this direction, besides the apathy and ignorance of the workers, is the difficulty of so arranging air movement that it will not be the cause of breakage of threads. This leads on to the question of humidity, for it is to avert the same damage to material that a damp atmosphere is required in cotton mills. Custom can make it more possible to work in hot damp air, and if the air is in motion a higher wet bulb temperature becomes tolerable, but when all allowances are made, the humidity in many cotton mills, especially in ones where the coarser yarns are spun and much size is used, must be responsible for a steady lowering of the physique of workers. The urgency of the need for ascertained standards<sup>\*</sup> and for the introduction of the best methods is very great. This urgency is felt by leading firms of employers, and many experiments are being made. The appointment of Mr. Terence Maloney as adviser on humidification to the Government of India, and his reports will, it is hoped, secure the fixing of a reasonable standard. At present during the hottest months the average hot bulb temperature in weaving sheds is about eighty-five degrees Fahrenheit. Though no women work in cotton-weaving sheds, the health of their fathers and husbands has a direct effect on their lives, and they themselves in many cases work in humidified sheds, though the temperature may not reach quite so high a figure.

<sup>\*</sup> The vagueness of clause (d) sect. 9 of the Indian Factories Act, makes it almost impossible for inspectors to interfere. It is as follows: "(d) the atmosphere shall not be rendered so humid by artificial means as to be injurious to the health of the persons employed therein." Local Governments are empowered to make rules to provide for "Standards of . . . artificial humidification and the methods to be adopted to secure their observance" but the fixing of a standard is not easy.





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The regulation of temperature is not the only point to be considered in humidification. The practice of introducing steam is widely criticized, and is giving place to other methods by which cool, damp air is admitted. Special precautions against the use of impure<sup>1</sup> water are necessary. Extreme humidity prevents evaporation, and this creates a condition in which the cooling processes of the human body operate very slowly. The heat generated by labour and by the warmth of the atmosphere is carried off so gradually that it is impossible for the body to effect the necessary return to normal temperature. These conditions are aggravated when rooms are overcrowded with machinery, and when there is too little space allowed for the individual employés. The danger of infection also is greatly increased.

A further question with regard to ventilation arises in connection with impurities in the air.<sup>2</sup> The cases in which any attempt is made to free the atmosphere from cotton and jute fluff are so few that they scarcely influence the general question at all as yet. The argument that jute dust need not be considered injurious because it falls so rapidly is to a great extent nullified by the fact that it falls on the faces of the workers and on the heads and bodies of the children who lie on the floors or in hammock cradles. The immediate and spontaneous lift of the hand to throat and chest, if a question is asked about illnesses to which jute workers are liable, is suggestive. The injurious effect of dust of any kind is only being gradually realized, and there is the further excuse for the employer in India that within or without the mill no human being escapes the dust evil except in monsoon weather. The cloud that accompanies a moving herd of cattle in any dry district shows the height to which the shifting surface of powdery earth rises. But perhaps nothing gives such a realization of the extent to which the air is dust-laden as what is known as the winter line, seen from the hill stations on the southern slopes of the

<sup>1</sup> The Indian Factories Act, sect. 12.

<sup>2</sup> Indian Factories Act, sect. 10. "If in a factory . . . it appears to the inspector that such inhalation could be . . . prevented by the use of a fan . . . the inspector may serve, etc."



Himalayas. Before the rains come, there lies what appears to be a deep bank of cloud right along the horizon till the hills impinge on it at either end. The stranger may notice the straight upper edge of this bank, may begin to wonder at its regularity day after day, and may at last be moved to ask questions. The reply that the dim, far-off mass is created by the dust of the plains seems unbelievable even then, and is almost more unbelievable when, after the rains during which clear intervals have revealed rivers winding into the distance and spreading in vast sun-illuminated stretches over the land seven thousand feet below, three or four days of unbroken sunshine renew the dim rampart of dust-laden air across the horizon.

It is scarcely to be wondered that the question is asked : "Why trouble about a little fluff?" Fluff-laden air, however, has special dangers for health, and the advantages to be gained by the introduction of exhaust fans and ducts on the machines from which the greatest amount of fluff emanates can scarcely be over-estimated. Groups of workers, too, can be relieved from the worst processes in many instances by the introduction of automatic feeding and stripping apparatus. In some ginning factories a fan has been erected at the ends of sheds to draw away the dust through pipes that cover the gin mouths. Sensitiveness with regard to air conditions is increasing, and mills are found where those who work amongst waste or in less well-ventilated sheds are allowed special privileges in the way of liberty to come and go. In other cases sheds that had been counted suitable are being discarded in favour of better buildings.

It is easy to lay stress on what is needed. It is difficult, perhaps impossible, to give an adequate impression of the urgency of the need. Nothing but the experience of hours spent in the stifling atmosphere of the worse ventilated mills can make it possible to realize the exhaustion and lassitude that result. And, when on a day of motionless air, attention is drawn to open windows and "splendid ventilation," there is irony in the situation. Yet in these conditions men and women labour through long hours,



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and little children doze in their hammocks or gaze on their world from half-hidden corners.

Other internal conditions vary greatly. In some mills the flooring is broken, giving ragged edges and gaps. Generally speaking, the paving is good, though it is often damp and slippery. There is room for great advance in the protection of machinery,<sup>1</sup> and it is often found that inspectors can secure progress in this respect by persuasion and suggestion even where they cannot legally insist on change.

In many mills there is much leisure, "chit-chatting," and coming and going. Only here and there a mill is found where definite efforts are made to create standards of continuous work.

In some places Muslims and Hindus are chiefly employed in different departments; in others they mix in work; but however willing they may be to work under one roof, their presence necessitates special arrangements for drinking-water.<sup>2</sup> There are few mills in which such supplies are brought within the actual building. A row of taps is usually found in some convenient part of the compound, and once the distinction is made between the pipes used by Muslims and those used by Hindus, it is rigidly adhered to. Sometimes, outcaste demands involve further regulations. In other cases outcastes working in the mills may have to bring drinking water with them. The fact that supplies are now so generally conveyed by pipes, simplifies to some extent caste difficulties with regard to drinking from a common source. The water that issues from the pipe is considered uncontaminated, and all that is not used flows away.

Before setting off to work in the morning, cold rice or dhal<sup>3</sup> left over from the previous night is eaten, but the earlier of the two principal meals of the day is taken within the mill compound unless the rooms occupied are very close, or unless there are restaurant hotels close at hand. In the majority of cases the midday meal is

<sup>1</sup> Indian Factories Act, sect. 18.

<sup>2</sup> Indian Factories Act, sects. 14, 37, 2 (i) and 41 (d).

<sup>3</sup> Lentils.



carried by the labourer to the work-shed in the morning, or brought later by some messenger. By the second alternative the advantage of hot, freshly cooked food is gained, but it can only be employed when the wife or some other relative remains in the lodging to cook it and bring it or to send it by a child.<sup>1</sup> When all the adults work in a mill, a cold meal hurriedly prepared in the early morning is all that can be obtained. The form of the pot or bowl in which the food is carried showing through the cloth in which it is tied, is a familiar sight on the streets and in the mills. Food that has to be prepared in the early morning makes a big demand on the woman worker, and her anxiety is not at an end when the meal has been prepared. It must be kept from contamination of every kind till it is actually eaten. The fear of having it touched or even shadowed is one cause of the difficulties that sometimes prevent mills from employing members of the depressed classes in the same room with caste women. Curious bundles, wrapped in cloths that have seen much use, are poised high on machinery or hung from a nail in the wall, and it is strange to think that if a covering of one were but touched, the contents would be flung away, no matter how hungry the owner might be. The food thus brought is usually eaten by a family group, or by a single worker, sitting in an odd space between machines, or in a neglected corner of the compound, indifferent to all the world and eating steadily through the meal. The disadvantages of such haphazard arrangements are very evident in dry weather, but during the period of the monsoon, rains, that in a few moments convert streets into rivers, descend at short intervals and may continue for weeks on end. It is not difficult to imagine the misery of conditions then. Various efforts are being made to meet the need of shelter and of hot food provided on the spot. In some mills rows of sheds are found, each one set aside for a particular national, caste, or outcaste group. In these, workers may find shelter from sun and from rain

<sup>1</sup> For difficulties arising from the fact that children are often sent into mills with food, see pp. 68, 229.





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but the sheds are seldom large enough to give room for all the workers in a mill, and in some cases they are only sparingly used in dry weather.

A further step has been taken by some employers, who provide tea. Tea-drinking is a new custom amongst the workers of India, but it has taken a firm hold, and the tea-houses in mills are very popular.<sup>1</sup> In some cases they seem to be open all day, and workers find their way to them as they will. In others, times are fixed. In one of the latter the two tea-rooms, one for Hindus and one for Muslims, were built in a quiet, enclosed yard. At the far end were kitchens, but in this case the two nationalities had chosen to use the same one, and the second was turned into a godown for straw. Though both groups used one fireplace, there were two cooks, a Muslim and a high-caste Hindu. Tea with sugar, but no milk, was poured into the buyers' tumblers of brass or white metal, and cost a halfpenny. A few employes spent another halfpenny on a piece of country bread or a biscuit. The tea-drinkers in this mill were chiefly drawn from the better-paid workers amongst the men. Few women took tea, and those who did had to drink it in the compound, as the men would not allow them to enter the shelters.

Other mills have gone still further and have arranged for canteens from which vegetables, dishes of rice and dhal, and loaves are served. Such an experiment demands a Brahman cook with a kitchen into which no one but himself, or another Brahman, is allowed to enter, and different serving windows for Muslims, caste-Hindus, and others. The food is carried to dining-sheds and eaten there. It is probable that the special arrangements for cooking and serving make it necessary to charge rather more than the price for which the workers could get similar food, for in some cases, at any rate, few take advantage of the new source of supply.

Efforts for effective sanitation have to surmount great difficulties in India, not only in mill areas, but throughout the country wherever large numbers of people are gathered together. Appliances and arrangements that are counted

<sup>1</sup> See note p. 161.



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indispensable in western cities, cannot be rapidly introduced where it is impossible to have such inspection as would secure thorough flushing and unbroken piping. The introduction of septic tanks in larger mills is of great advantage when these tanks and the flush system that is usually used to wash the contents of the latrines<sup>1</sup> into them are kept in perfect order. It may be possible to find mill compounds in which septic tanks have been introduced in worse conditions, through negligence, than other compounds where the older method of removing night soil by sweeper and cart or train beyond the city boundaries, is still in operation. In the septic tank impurities are dissolved and disinfected. It has been found that the microbe of hook-worm, a very prevalent disease in Bengal, can withstand the action of the chemicals usually employed in septic tanks, and may be carried to lower reaches of the river into which the liquid contents of the tanks are discharged, and experiments are being carried on in the hope that means may be found to make the disinfecting process complete.

The amount of latrine accommodation<sup>2</sup> supplied is probably sufficient for health when no cholera or enteric epidemic is raging, but in a large number of mills both the amount and the arrangement are unsatisfactory when standards of self-respect are considered. There are those both amongst Indians and amongst Europeans who resent these conditions not only from the health point of view, but also from the moral and social point of view. But no general lasting improvements will be secured till a very much stronger public opinion is created amongst those who control municipal activities, as well as amongst those employers who have not yet considered these matters seriously. In many places there is constant friction between mill-owners and Local Government officials about water supply and sanitation.

<sup>1</sup> In some places there are septic tanks, but no arrangements for flushing latrines. In these cases night soil and refuse are carted to the tanks.

<sup>2</sup> Indian Factories Acts, sect. 13, enacts that there must be "sufficient and suitable latrine accommodation." Detailed regulations are left to Local Governments. See sect. 37 (h).





## CHAPTER XII

## HOUSING

THERE are places where the housing of the mill population offers no serious difficulties. In a town like Nagpur, where open ground is available, many of the workers own their houses and pay a small sum of two and a half or three rupees a year in taxes. The houses may be built with considerable space between them on the outskirts of the town, or huddled closely together in more congested parts, but in either case no new problem is created.

The land occupied by a large population, including many mill workers, was acquired by the university lately, but all that was deemed necessary for the accommodation of the employes who would be turned off was to secure an area of ground as near the old site as possible on which they would be free to erect new huts. Some of the mill-owners make conditions more healthy and less exacting by improving water supply and assisting in the initiation of schools and dispensaries,<sup>1</sup> but no burden of housing falls on them.

In other country towns, such as Beawar in Rajputana, the housing problem begins to be felt in a limited way. There, besides the workers from the city, people come in from villages too far away to make it convenient for them to go to and fro every day, and for them very poor huts are erected in which they may sleep and take shelter during the working week. Though these huts may be very poor, they are usually built in open ground where fresh air is available, and as they are not intended to be homes, they may be judged less severely than similar erections within which workers live for months on end, though even for such half-time dwellings the practice of

<sup>1</sup> In co-operation with Welfare workers belonging to the Y.M.C.A.



using corrugated iron for walls and roofs should be strongly opposed.

The problem begins to become serious in more congested cities, such as Sholapur, with its hundred thousand inhabitants, and its lack of any sanitary system. Many of the labourers are village folk, and if the mills are near their homes they prefer to come and go daily. Others come from Sind and from the Carnatic, and these and the workers that gather to the mills in times of scarcity and become settled inhabitants can find lodging in the crowded streets of the old city, but they can only do so by still further congesting areas already over-populated, and the realization of this and of the increase of disease such overcrowding involves has led certain mill-owners to build new houses near their mills, where the workers will have all the advantages of air and space, and to acquire land on which employes, who prefer to build their own huts, are allowed to settle.

But it is when the big industrial centres are studied that the magnitude of the problem appears. Ahmedabad, Cawnpore, Calcutta, Bombay have each their special conditions, and must be considered separately. There are general questions with regard to what the responsibility of employers in this connection should be and the extent to which even in transition periods it is wise to have the housing of workers in their hands, which will be discussed later. And there is always and everywhere the practical question of the cost of building relative to rents and returns. Besides these, there are many details of preferences and requirements peculiar to India which affect the main questions, and it may be well to notice a few of these before turning to local conditions in the four large centres already mentioned.

When to the natural desire to live near friends and relations, whether these work in the same mill or at the same type of employment or not, there is added all that caste distinctions involve, it is clear that a large body of Indian labour will be reluctant to enter houses supplied by employers. It is true that much can be done to meet this reluctance. Buildings may be grouped so that members





of one caste or of one race may live together. If two-storey buildings are provided, it is of the utmost importance that members of lower castes are never placed above those belonging to higher castes, lest water dripping through the floor or anything falling from the balcony should touch cooking utensils or food below. There are Indians who look on the desire to live in racial and caste groups as amongst the things that must be eradicated by education, and who have little sympathy with efforts to meet the wishes of the workers in this respect. But there is a danger of pressing forward too rapidly. To educate men and women to a sense of wide brotherhood is an ideal to be aimed at, but to succeed in making them indifferent to their human surroundings without the introduction of wider ideals may only result in lowering standards and in delaying the development of the sense of citizenship that should rightly supply the place of caste loyalties.

There is further a great dislike to the control that may be exercised over employées living in provided dwellings. It is obvious that the employer who builds sanitary and rain-proof houses for his workers will claim the right to supervise these. As conditions are at present if this is not done (and in some places it is very inadequately done) the drains and the roads soon become almost as bad as those in the unregulated bazars. This fact is often made an excuse for allowing workers to go on crowding into the insanitary alleys of cities. The resentment that is roused by sanitary inspections and restrictions in some localities may be partly due to the rough and ready ways in which these are carried out, and to the fact that free use of disinfectants<sup>1</sup> may outrage caste feelings, but there is little question that very many workers are not only entirely ignorant of the simplest elements of hygiene, but dislike and fear the practice of them.<sup>2</sup>

Mill dwelling-houses are at the same time too isolated

<sup>1</sup> The use of disinfectants is local and is, by some authorities, considered a confession of failure rather than a sanitary improvement.

<sup>2</sup> See p. 176.



and too public for the tastes of the workers. They do not merge into local bazars, into the crowded buildings of the city, nor into the open ground or jungle that may lie on the outskirts. They are intrusions, both in appearance and in the ideas underlying them, and as such are approached timidly. On the other hand, there is a prevailing sense of lack of privacy about them which makes family life difficult. The very narrow verandahs that are built in many areas push within four walls some of the activities of daily life that would naturally be carried on in a broad verandah screened from the public gaze by matting or tattered hangings. Where rent is charged and an attempt is made to limit the number of occupants in one room, tenants, especially those who, coming from country homes, have never paid house rent before, are apt to prefer to share a dearer room with many others, outside, and so to retain a greater freedom, however unsatisfactory and insanitary the accommodation may be.

The employer who is convinced of the value of suitable housing has to face the fact that he will be confronted by these difficulties, and he has still others to face. In many areas it is not possible to acquire land at a moderate cost. In others the land in the neighbourhood is all agricultural, and may not legally be used for building purposes. He has in most cases to be content with a very small, or even with no, return for outlay, though he may eventually be well repaid in the efficiency and health of his workers. He has also to make up his mind to the fact that his houses will be occupied by many who are not in his employment, and that even if no houses are let except to those actually working in his mill, relations and dependants will crowd in to share the dwellings. In some districts, too, the compact rows of houses erected in or close to the mill compound may be used as an easy labour-poaching ground by the overseers of other mills. It is little wonder that employers who are not convinced of the great advantages from an economic point of view of healthy and vigorous workers are slow to experiment with expensive schemes.



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The city of Bombay is built on an island, the channels which separate it from the northern and much larger island of Salsette, and those that separate the latter island from the mainland, have been bridged, and two great railway systems, the Bombay, Baroda, and Central India Railway, and the Great Indian Peninsular Railway, have their terminal stations in the city. The general lie of the mill areas has been suggested, but it may be well to recall it. The northern part of the island consists of a broad, oblong area of ground, but to the south-west two narrow promontories run out towards the ocean. The more northerly one, Malabar Hill, rises to the height of a few hundred feet, and hides on its ridge in the midst of foliage the Towers of Silence.<sup>1</sup> Far out towards Malabar Point stands Government House. The more southerly peninsula of Colaba is much longer and narrower. Between these two lies a great and most beautiful stretch of water, named Back Bay.<sup>2</sup> The long line of lights that outlines its shore at night is known as the "diamond necklace" of Bombay. The docks face eastward toward the mainland, which can be seen dimly in the distance. Between Back Bay and the docks most of the modern Western buildings and residences are situated, and right up the centre of the island runs a network of closely packed streets, lanes and bazars, into which it is always possible to dive from the Europeanized surroundings of buildings and squares. The area covered by these closely packed streets increases in breadth in the district to the east of Malabar Hill and stretches north through the central part of the island. It is in these lanes and bazars to the north of the city that most of the immigrant labourers must find room to live, and in them there are countless buildings, three to five storeys high, which are known as 'chawls.'<sup>3</sup> Many of these are held by private owners; others are the property of the

<sup>1</sup> In the Towers of Silence the Parsee funeral rites take place.

<sup>2</sup> A reclamation scheme is in operation at present to secure a part of this bay for building purposes. The plans have been made in the hope that the general outline of the bay though smaller will be as beautiful.

<sup>3</sup> A tenement building specially constructed for and occupied by the poorer classes.



Bombay Improvement Trust; some are owned by employers.

Two or three mills are situated in Colaba to the south of the city. The experiments in housing in one of these give insight into some of the difficulties connected with the problem. Perhaps the great beauty of the situation makes the onlooker more sensitive to contrasts. From the ground on which the houses are built, and from the windows of workshops, the views over the open sea and down the dim mainland coast are wonderfully fine. The older houses built in chawl formation two or three stories high had their windows blocked with boxes, dove-cotes, and matting. The sanitary arrangements, provided and in this case managed by the municipality, were not in good condition. There was underground drainage, but pools of water lay around, the smell was bad, and the alleyways were full of rubbish. This first experiment had proved so unsatisfactory that the employers were building new one-storey houses of which only a few were occupied. As yet these were orderly, but the manager seemed to have little hope that it would be possible to keep them so. He was considering the wisdom of offering prizes for clean houses, a plan which he had found to work well in the Punjab. The new houses had been let at a rent of five or six rupees a month, on the understanding that only one fire should be made in each room, but it was fully expected that the hospitable instincts of the workers, their dislike of isolation, and their desire to secure some annas towards the rent would make this rule a dead letter. So many of those who migrate into the cities to work have never had to pay house rent that it is often resented, and standards are so low in some directions, and in others so impossible to maintain in the new city surroundings, that it is scarcely to be wondered at that those who had been allowed to occupy sheds covered with matting, without payment, till the new houses were built, refused to leave the free shelters.

But any housing difficulties that strike the eye in the south of the island are as nothing to those that exist in the northern parts of the city. There, many of the



mill-owners have no ground on which to build houses, and no chance of buying it except either at such a distance from the mills that special transit arrangements would require to be made, or at an exorbitant price. The result is that the mill population is housed in chawls rented to them by others than employers. The general house shortage in Bombay is so great that in some cases clerks and business people have been grateful to rent rooms built for labourers by the Improvement Trust of the city, thus thrusting a greater number of workers into the wretched buildings alone available for them. It is very difficult to give any clear idea of what a group of really bad chawls is like. The alleyways that run between them are narrow. There is an open drain in the centre over which (theoretically) clothes and dishes must be washed. There is a water pipe at one end to supply perhaps forty rooms, which may mean sixty or more families. The sense of smell soon tells where the public latrines are. In the narrow spaces between the central drain and the walls there are heaps of rubbish, cabbage stems, banana skins, rice, old rags, and amongst them are kids, hens, chickens, children, dogs.\* As the eye glances upwards, it may see a wall variegated by rags, boxes, and matting. These indicate the stuffed-up windows of chawls that have inner tunnel-like passages, from which the occupants enter their houses. More often the wall is broken by the outline of narrow, very narrow, verandahs. When this is so, it is often only possible to see the verandah itself at intervals, as, for most of the way, it is completely covered by matting, boxes, boards and old clothes. From these verandahs, too, there hang saris and dhotis, but the space between the adjoining walls is far too scanty to afford room for drying the clothes of all the families. Iron railings in main roads are used as drying grounds, and it is not unusual to see a dhoti or a sari spread flat on the pavement at some quiet street corner. The rooms behind those stuffed-up windows and draped verandahs are dark. It cannot be said that they are uniformly dark, because inner ones,

\* Pariah dogs, half-starved and sometimes vicious.



especially some ground-floor inner ones, are even darker than the others. A floor space of ten feet by ten feet may give the air space demanded by the Bombay by-laws, and is a very common measurement. The rooms in the top storey may be little more than hollows beneath a sloping roof. When chawls like these are built on open roads, the ground floor is frequently occupied by small shops with open frontage, for which a high rent is charged for a very small space. The appearance is of boxes set on one side on a fairly high plinth. In full view are the stores, sweetmeats, fruit and vegetables, whatever they may be, and seated amongst them, perhaps actually ladling sweetstuffs from the shallow pan in which they are cooking, is the salesman. In the recesses behind the shops are dwelling rooms, and from somewhere lost in the darkness there rises a steep staircase or ladder to the close-packed dwellings above.

The heaviest burden of such conditions falls on the woman. A large proportion of the men sleep out of doors, many of them on the pavements of the city.<sup>1</sup> At first the new-comer is startled by their likeness to corpses, but soon the sight becomes familiar. Probably where the chawls have any breadth of verandah some women do sleep outside, but conditions even out of doors in the narrow alleys are much worse than on the open pavements. In most cases, however, exhausted with her long day's work, she huddles down to sleep in the dark, unventilated room along with women lodgers and relations and their children and her own.

In the early morning she must rouse herself and hasten to the pipe to take her turn in securing water for the day. Water for drinking, water for bathing, water for cooking, water for scouring dishes must be carried in vessels to her room or to the open drain opposite to it. At certain seasons water is scarce in Bombay, and is turned off from the main during the day.<sup>2</sup> The working woman is scarcely likely to have more than two vessels in which

<sup>1</sup> See p. 95.

<sup>2</sup> There is a strong feeling that the municipality should insist that landlords provide more taps so that all the women in the chawls may have the opportunity of getting enough for the day before the supply is cut off.





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to keep a supply, so as much as possible must be drawn and used before she goes to work. In the stuffy atmosphere of the room a fire has to be lit, and if a lodger happens to be of a different jat, a second fire may add its quota of smoke in another corner.<sup>1</sup> The pungent smoke from cow-dung cakes or wood finds its way out as best it may. It is after such a night and morning that the woman-worker finds her way to her day's employment at the mills. It is not to be wondered at that the infant mortality in Bombay is high.<sup>2</sup>

The weekly rental for these rooms when in private ownership in some cases is only three to five rupees, but in specially populous areas it seems to run much higher. Such monthly prices as twenty-five rupees for rooms fourteen feet by ten, and forty rupees for others twenty by twenty feet, suggest that the smaller ones may run up to fifteen or twenty rupees.

There are, of course, better houses available in some districts than in others. A pleasing contrast to those already described can be found in an alley of one-storey buildings erected on well-raised platforms. The general appearance is fresh and clean, and the homeliness is greatly enhanced by a trellis work over the roadway, from which convolvulus creepers send down wavering shadows. These houses were erected by an employer who had been fortunate enough to secure an open bit of land. But such open spaces are rare, and, no matter how willing directors may be, the problems offered in Bombay cannot be met in any adequate way within the city bounds.

It seems to be impossible to erect suitable houses at a rent that the factory worker can afford to pay. The Bombay Improvement Trust has naturally been cautious about going forward with schemes which would involve loss, not only because of the actual expenditure, but also because of the fact that its members might be accused of subsidizing one group of employers out of public funds. Interesting light is thrown on the fact that the rents are too high for the workers by the proposal made some

<sup>1</sup> Some chawls of newer types may have chimneys.

<sup>2</sup> See note on p. 188.



years ago by a leading mill-owner to take over blocks of chawls from the Improvement Trust at the full rental and let them out to his workers at a forty per cent. reduction. It is natural to ask why the sum spent thus was not paid in direct wages which would enable the workers to pay an economic rent. At present, however, there is little likelihood that higher wages would be spent on better dwellings.

The Improvement Trust is now launching out on a large scheme of housing for labourers, but the difficulty of obtaining land seems to have prevented any serious effort to provide one-storey houses in any numbers, and the truth of the matter seems to be that in the climate of Bombay, with its limited water supply, storied chawls can never provide suitable homes for families, though when they are sanitary they might be considered healthy temporary dwellings for men.<sup>1</sup>

The mill industry is increasing rapidly, and the area that can eventually be reclaimed from the sea is limited. The housing problem in Bombay forces attention to proposals for decentralization,<sup>2</sup> proposals that are often brushed aside as foolish by the business man, but which may yet hold the secret of the widespread revival of Indian commercial and industrial life.

The city of Ahmedabad is situated on the left bank of the Sabarmati. Its walls enclose an area of two square miles. A considerable amount of this is open space not available for building, especially along the river bank, but the remaining portion is covered with streets, alleys, lanes, and courts so closely packed together and so crowded with people that here, more than in many another perhaps equally over-populated area, the stranger is impressed with a sense of innumerable masses of human beings moving hither and thither, and disappearing, apparently into nowhere, only to make room for more people and more. This sense is increased by the fact that at one point a main street is carried over another on a bridge so low

<sup>1</sup> See *Indian Social Reformer*, December 23, 1922, March 10 and April 28, 1923.

<sup>2</sup> See p. 257.





that it seems impossible that the carts and garis<sup>1</sup> can get under it—yet they do. Part of the congestion is due to the fact that in the central part of the city various quarters known as “pols” are entirely separated from each other. The complexity is increased by the dense, dusty atmosphere that pervades the place. Within this crowded area there are no less than ten mosques, some of them of great beauty, but only a few cotton mills have found room. The latter are scattered in groups, beyond the wall near the more important gates through which the life of the city comes and goes, or farther out along the main roads into the country districts. They draw their workers from the densely packed courts already mentioned, from villages just beyond the walls, and even from others on the farther bank of the Sabarmati, across which the workers wade to work except when the river is rushing down flooded by the monsoon rains. But these sources of supply are not adequate in the months during which workers are scarce, and various employers have provided a certain amount of housing accommodation from which they draw rents equivalent to a return of from two to ten per cent. on the original outlay and cost of upkeep.

The different types of dwellings erected by employers vary extraordinarily, and it is easy to see within quite a small distance some of the worst provided accommodation and some of the best. Not long ago, low huts of brick or mud, falling to pieces, or of unplastered bamboo battens with interwoven leaves and matting, roofed, in either case, with sheets of corrugated tin over-lapping from hut to hut so that the appearance from above was of an almost flat mass of tin sheets covered with rubbish, firing wood, pots, and oddments of all kinds, were considered suitable houses for permanent workers. Such structures, or ones even more primitive, made of iron sheets, leant up against each other and covered with matting, are still used for temporary workers who come to build in the compounds.

Though these rude tin huts are little in evidence now,

<sup>1</sup> Victorias.



there are many one-storey, one-room dwellings that either have never been sound structures or else have become so dilapidated that they are utterly unfit for habitation. Some of the worst conditions occur when open drains become blocked and are allowed to remain so, with stagnant pools of water spreading over the alley-way close to heaps of decaying fruit, rice, and green vegetables which attract endless swarms of flies. Another pernicious custom is that of emptying rubbish into open tanks. Even if there be a separate supply of water,<sup>1</sup> the conditions when wells or small tanks close to dwelling houses are used as rubbish-shoots are appalling. New ideas are afloat, however, and a reference to the undesirability of such conditions will bring the ready reply that a septic tank is to be introduced in "three months," or "next year." The knowledge that there is much in the city that "was" or "is going to be" may prevent undue optimism, but the quickness of the suggestion proves that the need for higher standards is gradually coming into recognition.

Some of the most enterprising employers have built, and are building, remarkably good houses in open spaces, where the occupants have many of the advantages of country districts. Three methods are in use. In one, the houses are of one storey and are built back to back in rows. The better types of these are built on raised platforms, with mud or brick walls and a tiled roof, in which, in some cases, there is a ventilator. Two-storey chawls built in blocks are also found. Frequently a whole block is occupied by workers of one caste. When this is the case, differences in the habits and standards of different castes can be clearly seen, and blocks are pointed out which have been occupied by one group after another of thrifty and industrious workers who have saved money and returned to their land, leaving empty rooms for others from the same villages to fill and in turn to vacate with a competency.

An interesting plan of mill suburbs has been suggested

<sup>1</sup> The general supply for the city is filtered after being drawn from wells sunk in the bed of the river



for Ahmedabad,<sup>1</sup> by which six areas of land would be selected for development. The position of each garden suburb was chosen, not only because of its nearness to mills, but also because of its healthy situation and because of the possibility of acquiring more land contiguous to it. The plan showed small rows of houses grouped in garden spaces with trees and flower plots. One model village was being built in 1921, and a few of the houses were already in occupation. There were large open spaces on which no building was permitted, and a considerable amount of liberty was allowed to the tenants to add to the privacy of their homes by enclosing yards both at the back and at the front of their houses.

It will be interesting if Ahmedabad, famous for its overcrowding and for its unhealthy conditions, should join Cawnpore in taking a lead in raising the standard of industrial housing. Its Trade Unions give it special advantages. It shares with Cawnpore the possibilities that surroundings of open land give, but it has very great difficulties to contend with in climate, dust, and disease. Those who are eager for advance are retarded, too, by the difficulty of securing the co-operation of the municipality with regard to water supply and sanitation. The familiar contention expressed by the local governing body: "You are agitating for the benefit of the mills," and the reply: "Yes, but it helps the community too," seems as prevalent here as on the banks of the Hooghly, and constantly prevents the co-operation that is an obvious necessity in the present state of things.

In Cawnpore conditions are very different. The development of mill industry there has been partly due to the fact that its position made it so good a centre. Five of the great railway lines of India enter its station, bring in raw materials, and carry its manufactured goods far and wide. Its growth is of comparatively recent date. In 1855, before the opening of the Government Harness Factory and the founding of the Elgin Spinning and

<sup>1</sup> See Memorandum of Evidence on "Industrial Employees" submitted by A. E. Mirams, F.S.I., F.S.A., to the Indian Industrial Commission, 1916-17.



Woollen Mill, which marked the inauguration of its commercial and industrial growth, it was an unimportant town. It is now one of the leading centres of modern industry. Large leather factories and wool mills employ many thousands of workers. Twelve thousand eight hundred people are engaged in the manufacture of cotton yarn and cloth. This rapid increase is due partly to the fact that there, more than in any other industrial area in India, a settled resident mill population has come into existence. Most of the mills are situated between the new city and the River Ganges to the north and north-west of the former. The country round the city is fertile, and the widest cotton-growing tract of the United Provinces approaches its outskirts.

In the earlier history of its industrial development it was found difficult to secure a sufficient number of workers, but latterly there has been a change in this respect. Whether, owing to local conditions or to the special enterprise of leading employers, more housing has been undertaken in proportion to the number of workers employed than in any other city except Calcutta.<sup>1</sup> The latest development in this direction, and one startlingly new for India, is a request<sup>2</sup> for hostels for working girls.

In the course of a series of articles<sup>3</sup> on "Welfare Work for Indian Employees," Mr. W. H. Wiser, of the American Mission, Cawnpore, writes of the problem of housing for the skilled<sup>4</sup> and for the unskilled workman. His experience is so valuable, and the emphasis he lays on certain aspects of the questions relating to housing applies so strongly to cities other than Cawnpore, that it seems desirable to quote at some length from these articles.

In the number of the magazine for March, 1922, after a vivid description of the crowded hovels in which many

<sup>1</sup> See *Annual Report on the Working of the Indian Factories Act in the United Provinces for the Year 1920*, by Lewis A. Parker, M.I.Mar.E., Appendix i, Housing Accommodation, pp. 14, 15.

<sup>2</sup> This request was made to a missionary society. The workers were to be employed in leather factories.

<sup>3</sup> In *British Indian Crafts*, Editorial and Publishing Offices, 1, Crooked Lane, Calcutta. Numbers from January to August, 1922.

<sup>4</sup> Mr. Wiser suggests that the term "skilled workman" may be used for a labourer who earns thirty rupees a month or more.



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workers live in the city of Cawnpore, some of them in lanes "so narrow that a man has to turn sideways to pass through them," Mr. Wiser goes on to point out that :

"It must be quite evident to the reader that someone has got to befriend the labourer in this most vital problem of his home. Engineers must discover cheaper types of practical sanitary houses. Municipalities must place less restrictions on buildings erected for the housing of labourers. Government must furnish cheap land for the erection of these non-profit producing houses.

"If a company is prepared to build houses for its dependents it must provide for all, otherwise there will be overcrowding in the mill houses, as much as outside. If a man is not given a house he will, by paying a small lodging fee, inveigle someone into adopting him as a brother. The writer personally saw fourteen such 'brothers' in a house of ten feet by twelve. Also, no man should be given a house unless he has a family.

\* \* \* \* \*

"Where the companies are willing to house the families the labourers will be willing to bring their families."

In the following number he draws attention to the contrast between the mud hut in the average village and the well-built room and verandah in the mill area, dwelling sympathetically on the ways in which the latter is less desirable from the labourer's point of view. In criticism of the publicity of the ordinary mill line, he writes :

"One of the common instincts of humanity is that of a desire for family privacy. The single room with the open verandah in front does not lend itself to privacy. In one village out of three hundred and thirteen houses occupied by families, two hundred and forty-eight have been completely screened with gunny cloth, bamboo, reed or mud walls, and thirty-five have been partially enclosed. In other words, ninety per cent. of the families living in these houses have tried to create privacy for themselves. Efforts have been made from time to time to prevent the erection of these screens, but without



success. Would it not be wise in planning future houses of this type to take this matter into consideration?

“The courtyard does enable privacy. . . . When the door to the front courtyard is opened everything in it is open to the gaze of the neighbours. With the courtyard in the rear, the man of the house may entertain his friends on the front verandah or in the room, while the women-folk go about their household duties in the rear undisturbed.”

The city of Calcutta lies on the left bank of the Hooghly. Its trade is carried on under the difficulties that attend a port which has between it and the open sea a hundred and twenty miles of river that can only be navigated under the direction of skilled pilots who are kept in touch with continuously changing surveys of the river channels. Connected with the city by a pontoon bridge is Howrah on the right bank, a town of mills, business quarters, and squalid dwellings. There are no mills in Calcutta city. A few are found on its eastern side near Sealdah, the terminus of the Eastern Bengal and the Calcutta and South Eastern railways. These and the groups in Howrah across the river are the only ones whose workers find their dwellings in the two cities. But to north and south on both banks of the river, sometimes in groups, sometimes singly, jute factories rise, and the problem of housing has to be faced in conditions quite different from those of the other centres.

City dwellers in Calcutta find rooms in the densely crowded lanes and courts that fill spaces behind and between main thoroughfares. There is never scarcity of water there and even in the city great open tanks surrounded sometimes by narrow pleasure gardens break up the solid masses of dwellings. The houses that surround these tanks may be of considerable size, but in some districts it is only necessary to penetrate between and behind them to find, roughly put together buildings which are little more than a series of boxes opening outwards. This is characteristic of ground-floor shops and small factories, but when on upper storeys, too, nothing is found but one small room after another, like those of a doll's





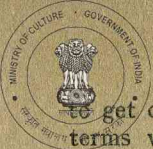
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House, all opening on to a narrow verandah that runs round three sides of the building, the restricted nature of the accommodation is realized. The piles of waste cotton that filled a tenantless one seemed far more in keeping with their surroundings than the musical instruments of the players who lived on the other side of the wall.

Further away from the open frontage a row of shops, in which men were hammering iron platters while the open fires over which the metal discs were held glowed up into their faces, led on to a cigarette factory, shops and factory alike occupying similar box-like spaces, some of which might have exits at the back in the shadows. Only a stone's throw further on a narrow lane, chiefly gutter, with the roofs of the opposite one-storey houses so near and so low that it almost seemed as if their edges might be used as hand rails, led into a small open space from which three or four other lanes diverged. It was not surprising to know that the medical authorities were seen there day by day removing cases of enteric or of cholera. In other districts less dirty and with wider alleyways, even smaller rooms may be found, apparently only about five feet by six, with a tiny recess for cooking behind the door. The early experiments of the Calcutta Improvement Trust convinced the members that they could not build suitable houses at a sufficiently low rent, and the fact that comparatively few mill workers live within the city, has made this aspect of the housing problem less urgent than it is in Bombay.

The workers in the riverside mills have a wider choice. At the coming of the new industry the local village bazars are enlarged, and new ones appear. In and around these, collections of huts known as bustis spring up on land owned by private individuals, who very often are sirdars in the mills. The owners may let out the huts, or they may let small plots of ground on which the workers themselves may build. No great sum of money is sunk in these erections, either by the landlord or by the worker, and it is not so difficult to secure ground as it often is for employers who wish to lay out permanent buildings. In the latter case it is sometimes impossible for firms



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to get clear titles to the land they want, or to come to terms with all the tenants and part-owners who may have interests in it.

Besides the bazar houses and the groups of huts that surround them, there are often scattered bustis in open spaces or in jungle ground. These are much more like the home dwellings of many of the immigrant workers. In them the huts are sometimes built round courtyards or on the edges of deep stagnant tanks which are often covered with green weeds and slime. They are placed at all possible angles to each other, with great freedom, and with entire indifference to outward appearance. Yet, on the whole, they are picturesque, and give an impression of individuality and of privacy. From a sanitary point of view, both they and the close clusters of houses round the bazars are appalling. But it is scarcely to be wondered at that workers from country districts do not realize that habits that may have no obvious evil results in wide, open stretches of land are fatal where thousands crowd together. Their ignorance does not prevent the disease and debility that follow.

The realization on the part of employers of the unsatisfactory conditions in which their workers lived, frequent epidemics amongst the latter, and the difficulties that were found in securing and retaining a large enough number of workers, have led many firms to erect housing accommodation either within the mill compound or close to it. The quality of the materials used in building, the sanitary arrangements, and the methods and effectiveness of the management differ widely from mill to mill, and the resulting conditions are similarly varied. But in a study of the general question it should be possible to give a description that suggests both best and worst, and to retain in mind the fact that some mills avoid many of the disadvantages, while others fail to secure the more important benefits of the line system of housing.

A very considerable number of mills charge no rent for the rooms that workers occupy; others ask a small rent of eight annas, one rupee or two rupees a month. The whole of this may go in upkeep and management,





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or there may be a small margin of profit of a quarter per cent., one per cent., or in exceptional cases three or four per cent. On the other hand, firms are known to spend two, three, and even seven thousand rupees annually on upkeep.

The word line is suggestive of the general characteristics of provided housing in the mills that are scattered along the banks of the Hooghly. In some instances two-storey buildings are found, but the majority are ground-floor single rooms built in long rows. Many of them come up to the standard of "good clean houses that are dry in the rains and fairly cool in the hot weather." A broad distinction is drawn between pucca and kutcha built houses, and many mills have some of each kind.<sup>1</sup> The rooms in pucca lines may have walls of brick or of coke breeze, with an open space between wall and roof for ventilation, with floors of patent stone a foot or more above the level of the ground. The roof, in which in rare instances there is a chimney, may be of double tiles, or of concrete, or possibly of asbestos sheeting, and will cover a narrow verandah of three to five feet in width. Paved roads will run between one row and another, and in these roads a carefully constructed open drain, with a constant and free supply of running water, will carry off debris to main drains. There will be frequent water taps giving supplies of filtered water, bathing houses or pools, and latrine accommodation connected with septic tanks. In some cases there is electric light. There may be a school, a mosque, and a shrine, and there will certainly be a good bazar with a fairly large variety of wares on display. The dispensary, too, may be in the lines, though more often it is in the mill compound. On a clear, cool day, lines of this description, if they are

<sup>1</sup> Pucca = baked, kutcha = half-baked. The words are in constant use to distinguish between reliable work and slipshod work. Kutcha houses are usually built of bamboo and mud, and are not necessarily for that reason less suitable, but it is much more difficult to keep them in repair, and they do not admit of the thorough washing-out process that more strongly built rooms do. There is no hard and fast rule with regard to what other conditions go with the pucca or with the kutcha house, but, except in cases where the mud and bamboo structure is definitely chosen by enlightened employers because of the workers' preference for it, and is kept in good repair, it is apt to become dilapidated.



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well managed, and especially if a considerable number of them are built a little distance back from the edges of the large tanks that abound, look at a first glance wonderfully bright and cheerful, and no surprise is felt that Calcutta is extraordinarily proud of its housing.

There are few lines that come up to the foregoing description in all respects, but even if many did, the root objections to them would not be removed. Before discussing these it may be worth while to gather some less general details from varied areas. When there is no wall nor any open space to separate mill lines from privately owned ones in bad condition, it is almost impossible to keep the former in good order. Broken drains, blocked with rubbish, and roads on which heaps of garbage tempt prowling pariah dogs, overflow into the more orderly ones of the mill property. Even where there is not such close proximity, the difficulties of maintaining cleanliness are great.

Rubbish is gathered into heaps within low enclosures, or in bins, to keep it from blowing away. These are placed at intervals at the ends of the lines, and though on cloudy, still days the rubbish may be damp enough to lie in the bins, a few hours of hot sunshine will make it ready to blow about again should a high wind arise, and even a slight wind will carry smells and germs. Much could be done by providing bins with lids, and with moveable bottoms to permit of thorough cleaning out. But except in mills that dispose of their own rubbish, little permanent improvement can be expected, until municipalities and employers co-operate more fully. Carts that come round to take away debris for three hours in the morning and three in the afternoon, and that frequently are not numerous enough to remove the contents of all the bins, and so leave heaps lying till next time, do not meet the need.

In one jute mill one rupee a month is charged for a room eight feet by twelve feet in lines for men only. Such a room is meant to accommodate four. At the back of each is a fireplace, and in front of this runs a low earthen wall of two feet or so in height. A narrow covered path runs in front of these rooms, bordered by





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an open, evil-smelling drain, and just beyond that separated from it by a narrow bank, is a tank. On the day these lines were seen a stoppage in the machinery had closed the mill, and the rooms were crowded, some with a few men and many boys, some with men only. In one six men were lying flat on the ground. An upper storey, facing in the opposite direction, had smaller rooms which, however, were attractive, as they had a broad roof space in front, were much more private, and had an open outlook. Unfortunately there were only a few of these.

At the end of this row of houses, but separate from it, was an enclosure, perhaps eight feet square, evidently a shrine, but on that day so full of people that no image could be seen. A ceremony was going on and music was issuing, with the drum dominant. An alleyway turned off at right angles, and the houses on the left side of this seemed roomier, perhaps chiefly because they had a broad, covered verandah in front. The houses on the other side were smaller. They had been built, as an afterthought, between the others and the tank. The small ones looked quite dark owing to the fact that the good-sized windows facing on to the water were stuffed up. There might be much excuse for this, as the place was probably infested with mosquitoes. Further progress was discouraged because "the smell was bad at the end near the latrines." But people lived at that end. In this lane there was a raised platform perhaps twelve feet by sixteen feet, with a gay cloth supported on poles, rather like panchayat meeting-places in villages, but used here for shows. Other lines connected with the same mill were much crowded, and the drains had rice and many other kinds of rubbish lying in them. A salesman, with his goods carefully balanced in two large scales, threaded his way down the alley. Children, women and men moved up and down and squatted on the narrow verandahs.

In another compound, where the company was trying gradually to displace old lines by new ones as these were built, members of the management were not only keenly interested in the matter, but were also working out plans



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by which the preferences of the workers could be met. One of the former urged the desirability of a five-foot verandah in place of the only too common three-foot one, and of trees down the middle of the roadway where workers could sit and enjoy the shade and feel the south wind which blows for nine months of the year. Mention was made of the well-known objection on the ground that it would be difficult to keep the open spaces clean, and the further difficulty that the roots of the trees might undermine the houses. New blocks of houses built in Indian courtyard style were being put up as an experiment. These were meant for joint-family groups of Hindus, and were completely private, as the only opening to the inner court could be screened. These were specially meant for workers from a considerable distance, as the Bengalis do not bring their wives with them, but go off for three months of the year, and "work much harder at home" than in the mills. The Muslims are said to like lines.\* Some of the newer lines in this compound had verandahs which, though only three feet wide, had enclosing walls of three feet or so in height half-way along the room fronts. Behind these the fireplaces were built, and the actual dwelling was thus less crowded and less smoky. All the houses in that mill were rent-free, but the jamadar, the headman of the durwans,<sup>2</sup> charges a levy of one or two rupees for allowing anyone to take possession of a house. The employers find it difficult to prevent this, and say that even if a European were employed to allocate the houses, the jamadars would still get round the people and claim their toll. At the same time the hope was expressed that it might be possible eventually to get rid of this difficulty by charging a small sum of, say, two annas a week and keeping books with numbered houses and records of the names of the occupants. Apparently a similar plan had proved successful in some other mills.

The company that controls another mill owns a large

\* In many cases they come to the mills without their wives, and live in groups of four or six. They do everything for themselves, and arrange who shall buy in the bazar and who shall cook.

<sup>2</sup> Gate-keepers.





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stretch of land close to the river bank. On the way to the jungle houses stands the Zamindari office, where the landlord business of the firm is carried on. Some of the huts in the jungle were wonderfully clean and tidy in appearance; some very dilapidated. They were among trees and beside pools of stagnant water the banks of which shelved abruptly down from the level of the huts. A new house was being built. The bamboo posts were up and there was a slight interlacing of dried leaves. The roof was at the same stage. It sloped steeply, giving a very slight shelter in front of the house. Mud and thatch would complete walls and roof. It was crowded into a corner behind other huts.

The inhabitants of the busti resented the continual additions to the mill lines which pushed them further into the jungle. The aim of the firm is to induce them to come into the lines, but they are often unwilling. Some of those who live in the jungle come down to the lines for water, but many prefer their own stagnant tanks for washing clothes, for bathing, and even for cooking. The water is softer and is said to swell the rice better. In a cleared space under a matting screen there was an orderly shrine, but the image had been removed. Fishing nets were spread on the ground, and a small canal, the dull khaki-coloured water of which could be seen far below, was filled from bank to bank by boats in single file laden with dried grass.

In the lines there were very good married quarters, evidently for skilled workers, each of which had its yard entirely shut in and quite private. Over the high wall the tops of the plantains could be seen. Even in these better houses the windows were boarded up. Some air could enter through a ventilating space of about half a foot between the top of the wall and the under side of the tiled roof and between the tiles. In contrast to these, many of the houses in the ordinary lines were built back to back, and had no through ventilation. They measured ten feet by ten feet, and had a three-foot verandah. A rent of two annas a week is charged when the floor is of mud; when there is a cement floor, the rent



four annas. These lines are built of brick with mud for mortar, and are spoken of as kutchha-pucca.

The bazar<sup>1</sup> in this mill was well situated and fairly clean. The stands on the raised concrete platform<sup>2</sup> were free, and the sellers weighed out their vegetables, fruits, grains, sweetmeats, and pice packets of tea,<sup>3</sup> regardless as ever of the innumerable flies that lighted everywhere. Heaps of tiny fishes lay exposed to the hot air, and were much fingered in counting out and selling. Besides the ordinary bazar there was a row of shops that could be locked up at night. For these a rent of from one rupee eight annas to two rupees was charged. In these, brass bowls and lotas, saris, tinned fruits, and jewellery were for sale. At an open part of the lines there were a country spirit shop and a tadi shop. The former was much like others to be found in the city. The bar-counter was entirely railed off up to the roof by square wooden posts between which the liquor was served. The room was bare and comfortless. The tadi shop, on the other hand, had a large open compound, and evidently most of the drinking was done in the open air. Low walls enclosed a space at one side, within which the venerable and respected men might gather, as the youths would not drink in their presence. This, however, was explained in the past tense, as if it were no longer necessary.

There was a fine schoolroom, but it was almost empty. A mosque had been built for the Muslims, and the Hindus had their stones under the sacred trees, peepul and banyan. In this mill, and in some others, the distribution of tanks, the touches of green above the walls of the larger houses, the patches of jungle, seen over the roofs of the lines and at the ends of their roadways, all served to break the monotony of the straight rows of rooms, and made them seem less barrack-like and depressing.

<sup>1</sup> Bazars and shops in mill lines are private enterprises. The manager may refuse to allow individuals to occupy stalls, but the firm has no business interest in the goods sold.

<sup>2</sup> See p. 215.

<sup>3</sup> Pice, or farthing, packets of tea are introduced into industrial areas to promote the consumption of Indian tea, by the Tea Cess Committee, which also encourages arrangements for the supply of liquid tea in towns, on railways, and at fairs. See Indian Tea Cess Act, 1903.



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Even if lines are retained, there are certain very obvious changes that might be made. The fiction solemnly related by a manager in another mill that it was best to have verandahs only three feet in depth, because, if they were wider, men would play cards all night and disturb their neighbours, can bear two explanations. Either the manager, whose excuse it was, had never considered the subject, and so said the first thing that came into his head, or else he thought well to answer a fool according to his folly. For shade, for privacy, for the enjoyment of leisure, a wide, covered space in front of the dwelling is an immense boon. It would involve the broadening of the roadways between the houses, and the outlay of more money. Mr. Wiser, in the passages already quoted, has touched on this and on other urgent needs, but the demand must be reiterated until the importance of it is realized. The lack of observation and of imagination is extraordinary. It is difficult to know how to reply to one who "did not think the people cared about trees," when up and down the land the villages can be picked out from the plains by the clumps of trees that surround them; when every well has its tree; when family groups rest during the heat of the day under a tree in their fields, or gather to smoke and talk by it at night; when not only are the tree roots chosen as sacred places, but prayer rags are tied on to their branches, and shrines are built in the hollows of their trunks.

No description can give the recurring sense of utter hopeless monotony that seizes the visitor at the sight of the bare asphalt roads lined by rooms, with no touch of irregularity or of individuality. As temporary lodgings for men who come alone to work and who return to the country frequently, they may be tolerated, but as suitable homes for families for whom a rising standard of life and of thought is desired, they are hopeless.

Many employers realize that even the best lines do not attract the men who wish to make their homes near the mills. They know that the Indian labourer prefers to live in a house that he himself has built, and it is surely lack of imagination chiefly that prevents them from



making experiments in the way of selling or renting small plots of ground on which huts may be erected. If all the sanitary arrangements already secured were still provided, but open spaces were left where lines of buildings now are, the money saved<sup>1</sup> might be expended on the larger area of ground required. An interesting experiment in this direction is in operation at Jamshedpur. Hexagonal Town is the name given to the new venture. The workers are encouraged to build their own huts, and each group of dwellings is arranged in the form of a hexagon.<sup>2</sup>

It is difficult to estimate the responsibility of the employer in the matter of housing, and to judge how far it is well that he should supervise the dwelling-places of his workers. The gathering together in great masses of employes who come from conditions, speak languages, and follow social customs different from those of the peoples into whose midst they come, and the fact that the localities into which they are drawn are often already overpopulated, and are inadequately supplied with sanitary and hygienic arrangements, seem to make it clear that a very real responsibility with regard to housing lies on the firms in whose mills they work.

If this is admitted, it might seem natural to urge all employers to provide accommodation for their workers, or for a large proportion of them, or at least for those who come from a distance. But even if all employers did follow one or other of these proposals, the questions involved would not be solved. And while it is clear that, during such a transition period as the present, the employer who can provide healthy accommodation for his workers is helping towards social as well as economic advance, it is equally evident that other methods must be introduced before any permanent solution of the question can be found.

Some of the reasons that are urged in favour of the

<sup>1</sup> An average cost for building a single room in a line is five hundred rupees. Some built on unstable soil which will only bear the lightest asbestos roofing cost seven hundred rupees each.

<sup>2</sup> See "Welfare Work in Indian Mills and Factories," by G. M. Broughton, M.A., O.B.E., *Journal of Indian Industries and Labour*, vol. ii, part iii, p. 348.



system of employer-landlord give the clue to the objections that can be raised against it. It is said that employers must build dwellings in order to get permanent hands ; in order to secure control<sup>1</sup> over the workers, and in order to supervise the conditions in which the latter live. The resentment aroused by such supervision has already been noted, but now the further point emerges that such control to be in any way effective includes the power of expulsion. Even in the case of the individual worker this may involve very serious hardship, as Mr. Wiser suggests when he writes : " In his home-village he (the simple-minded workman) was able to work hard for certain periods and then slack off and have a lazy period. He tries it on with his industrial employer only to find himself without a job, and to add misery to misery, a stalwart jamadar comes along and tells him to leave his house as soon as possible, and the quicker the better. If the man has broken all ties with the home-village, he finds life full of difficulties which he had never before faced. Again the employer hears the sad wail : ' Where am I to go ? I left the village and brought my family here. What are we to do and where are we to go ? ' " Other examples will occur to those who know what mill conditions involve. But when this power of expulsion may be held over the whole body of workers, or over a very large number of them, the control of the employer becomes a dangerous weapon, one which might prevent the development of Trade Unions on healthy lines, and might limit the growth of higher standards of living to those directions that met with the approval of the controlling body. Already, measures such as the stoppage of the water supply to mill houses have been taken to break strikes.

Yet the interests of the whole community are involved in the healthy and sanitary housing of the industrial workers. The advantages of a pure water supply, of

<sup>1</sup> See "Memorandum of Evidence on Industrial Employees," submitted by Mr. A. E. Mirams, F.S.I., F.S.A., Consulting Surveyor to the Government of Bombay, to the Indian Industrial Commission, 1916-17, pp. 31-47.



...bathing accommodation, of clean and rain-tight houses, of sanitary appliances, of the added leisure secured through being close to the mills, and the greater comfort in which meals can be taken if they have not to be carried from a distance, all tend to physical strength, and so benefit worker and employer alike. The comparative freedom from epidemics that attack less regulated districts is a benefit in which the general community shares. The employer, where really satisfactory housing schemes are in operation, secures a larger proportion of permanent workers, greater punctuality, and more regular attendance, not only because of the higher standard of health, but also because of the proximity of the houses to the mills.

But the real need for the future is the wider realization of the importance of the housing problem, and of the difficulties, both general and local, that attend its solution, so that leaders of public opinion, local authorities, employers, and, as Trade Unions develop, representatives of workers, may co-operate in the making of experiments with a view to securing the benefits connected with schemes already in operation, and securing also conditions that will appeal more to the preference of the workers with regard to privacy and homelikeness, and that will not involve power of eviction by the employers.

Various suggestions have already been made whereby employers might co-operate with local authorities, the latter granting sites free or at a nominal cost, and the former erecting buildings, while the management and letting of the houses is put into the hands of reliable agents. The latter would be difficult to secure, but all schemes for reform in Indian industrial conditions must aim at and take for granted the gradual decay of bribery and dasturi. Another suggestion that has been considered is that a number of mills should work together, with or without municipal aid, to provide housing accommodation without ear-marking it for any individual mill. Strong opposition has been raised to this, on the ground that such a centre would provide a sphere for labour-poaching, on the one hand, and for strike-engineering on the other.





• There is much to recommend the acquisition in suitable areas of land which could be let out in small plots to labourers who would build their own huts and pay ground rent and fees for water supply and sanitation. The immense difficulty of making effective even the comparatively small amount of supervision that would be needed to prevent unlimited overcrowding, and to secure the protection of the water supply and the observance of sanitary regulations, stands in the way of large experiments in this direction. The advantages of the Criminal Tribes Encampment at Sholapur, in which houses and huts of many types appear side by side, can perhaps be secured only amongst those who are segregated. It is a great achievement to have made a camp of that kind at the same time homelike and sanitary, and it is difficult to believe that areas holding out similar variety in arrangement and construction of houses and huts would not prove so attractive in industrial centres that a considerable amount of supervision would be tolerated.



## CHAPTER XIII

## HEALTH

IN matters of health, as in other aspects of this study, it is impossible to consider conditions in modern industry without having some slight framework in which to place them. There are no illnesses that are prevalent only in mill areas. The advance of medical science of late years opens up prospects of steady and unprecedented progress towards a higher standard of general health in the east. One type of epidemic after another has been patiently traced to its source, and now these sources are being attacked with steady persistence. The slackness and carelessness of human nature, great as these are, and the power of custom and superstition, must eventually give way before hygienic reform when the consequences at stake are so great.

It is confidently affirmed that the end of bubonic plague is within sight. Its epidemic recurrence might already be a thing of the past, were it not that rats carry infection over the gaps that occur ; with a steady rise in average cleanliness of dwellings, these pests will gradually be shut out from frequent access to human beings.

Smallpox is being fought by widespread efforts to secure the vaccination and re-vaccination of all. In this disease special difficulties meet the medical reformer, as the goddess of smallpox is held in great reverence. Her image, blurred beyond recognition, watches over wells, and holds an honoured place in the thoughts of the villagers. The coming of the disease with which she is associated is taken as a manifestation of her presence by many of the illiterate, and the proposal to take a sick child to an isolation hospital may be met not, as one might expect,



by unwillingness to part with the boy, but by fear to displease the goddess. "If Mata<sup>1</sup> has deigned to visit my house, who am I to send her away?" Still such protests have little power to withstand the public will as it increases in determination to secure immunity.

Cholera tracked the steps of pilgrims and claimed its victims annually during the festivals that are held at sacred places, at some of which many thousands congregate for a week or more in an area inhabited, during the rest of the year, by a few hundred simple villagers, some groups of professional beggars, and the priests that wait on the shrines. Little is known of the careful plans<sup>2</sup> by which the Government arranges for sanitary and hygienic conditions at these gatherings beyond the circle of those who are immediately responsible, but the decrease in death from cholera within recent years bears witness to their success.

Perhaps the most exciting incident in medicine just now is the discovery of treatment which it is hoped will prove to be a permanent cure for leprosy. If the hopes of experimenters are justified, the leper asylums of India will be changed into hospitals for treatment.

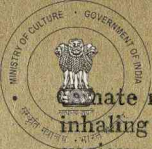
Malaria, with its clearly defined cause, will be hard to eradicate because of the extreme difficulty there is in preventing the occurrence of stagnant water open to the approach of the anopheles mosquito. But though the complete extinction of the latter cannot be hoped for in the near future, great progress is being made in many districts by drainage, and by the introduction of cultivation.

Consumption is prevalent, and the fact that it is often mistaken for malaria adds to the difficulty of dealing with it. Hundreds of workers from Bombay return to the villages of Ratnagiri to die slowly of "fever," which is only occasionally identified as tuberculosis. It is certain that mill conditions are responsible for some of these cases,<sup>3</sup> but no statistics are available from which propor-

<sup>1</sup> The goddess of smallpox.

<sup>2</sup> See *Fairs and Festivals in Bengal*, by Charles A. Bentley, M.B., D.P.H., D.T.M. and H., Sanitary Commissioner for Bengal.

<sup>3</sup> See *Tuberculosis in India*, by Arthur Lankester, M.D., pp. 180, 182, 247.



erate numbers can be judged. The irritation caused by inhaling fluff-laden air in cotton and jute mills causes various illnesses of throat and chest.

In the Bengal industrial area there is much hookworm.<sup>1</sup> This illness can be completely cured by treatment, and the treatment is provided in some of the mills, but as the hook-worm breeds in contaminated ground and enters through the skin of the feet of those who come in contact with it, the illness is apt to be contracted over and over again.

A vigorous educational campaign is carried on by the various Health Services in their efforts to raise the general standard of vitality. Illustrated sheets are scattered broadcast, printed in different vernaculars, but all bearing the same gruesome pictures of flies and mosquitoes, of hookworm and tubercle, magnified and dissected, and of the evil results of their activities. Besides scientific investigation and much machinery for prevention, the cities and larger towns of India are provided with hospitals and dispensaries controlled by the municipalities. Many institutions for the cure and alleviation of illness owe their origin to private individuals or to missionary societies. It is in those country districts in which there are no missions that the lack of medical help is most acutely felt. But the opening of hospitals and dispensaries does not adequately meet the need even in the cities. Even where there is accommodation in the former, many sufferers are entirely shut out from the advantages open to them by their own attitude. This is specially true with regard to large numbers of women, who are reluctant to go even to the maternity hospitals of Bombay and Calcutta, or the gosha<sup>2</sup> hospitals of Madras.

When great numbers of immigrants first gathered in the crowded mill areas, it was found that they became specially liable to epidemics. The hospital accommodation

<sup>1</sup> See *Annual Report on the Working of the Indian Factories Act in Bengal, Bihar and Orissa, and Assam, for 1920*, by R. P. Adams, O.B.E., A.M.I.Mech.E., p. 6.

<sup>2</sup> The word gosha is used in the south of India in the sense in which purdah is used in the north.



of the cities was inadequate. Apart from that, the need was felt for preventive measures. This led not only to the introduction of special water supplies, of better housing, and of more careful hygienic arrangements,<sup>1</sup> but also to the introduction of dispensaries within mill compounds, and to the appointment of doctors or hospital assistant surgeons by many firms. There are mills where any treatment that is done within the works is undertaken by the manager. Where the relations are friendly, the workers may prefer to come to the man they know. His simple medicines and bandages, aided by their faith in him, work wonders. In times when fever is raging, he may be seen dosing a whole roomful of workers from one or other of two bottles, containing respectively quinine and fever mixture. If his patients have heightened temperatures, they get mixture; if they have not, they get quinine. He has to discriminate, however, and takes the precaution where caste people are employed to send a workman from amongst themselves to fetch and to distribute the doses.

While a large proportion of mills have medical attendance of one kind or another, great differences in the quality of it may be noticed even by the uninstructed visitor. Two tests are specially useful. One is the condition of the dispensary. The other is the manner and bearing of the doctor. In some places the dispensary is like a very untidy scullery, and the attitude of the doctor is slack and indifferent. In one temporary dispensary the manager drew attention to the general disorder, and pulled the doctor up sharply: "You have two servants and a sweeper, and yet you let it be like this!" But when the imposing building that was almost ready for occupation as a permanent dispensary was visited, the bright rooms did not dispel the fear that conditions might soon deteriorate there too, for the operating table and the instrument case, though new, had already lost their freshness by standing in the empty rooms uncovered except by dust. The common custom of employing as mill doctors men with slight qualifications reacts on

<sup>1</sup> Especially in Calcutta.



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their work. They are treated with no deference and follow the manager at a respectful distance. It is almost impossible to draw them into conversation.

At the other end of the scale there are mills where almost all that corresponds to welfare work is in the hands of an experienced doctor. Such a man or woman makes the care of the employes a life work, and may be responsible for school and library as well as for general health, maternity work, and education in hygiene. The youth of India is stirred to-day with new hopes and aspirations, and, meeting such men and women, the westerner gets a glimpse into the life of a nation at a creative period. This is true of students along many lines, and it may be only the close connection of all medical effort with the progress of the labourers that makes a special atmosphere of romance linger round the memory of the young Indian women doctors who are throwing themselves, at the cost of much that seemed indispensable to their mothers, into the stream of modern life in their desire to help to build up a vigorous people. The need for their work in industrial areas is being realized more deeply with each new study of conditions there.

There are still to be found in India women from the west with long experience of the east who maintain that the introduction of European ideas with regard to the care of mothers and infants are unnecessary and superfluous; that the Indian mother gives birth to her children easily, and that the little Indian baby, oiled all over and laid out in the sun thrives under such treatment. And there are many Indian women whose answer to the suggestions of the woman doctor, or of the trained midwife, is similar to the remark made by a grandmother in Madras: "I bore fifteen children and no one troubled about me." The replies of those who have penetrated beneath the surface, and who know something of the real conditions, have weight neither with the first type of woman nor with the second as yet, but the circle of those whose minds are open to fresh

\* There is a woman doctor on the staff of at least three cotton mills, and there is little doubt that others will be appointed in the near future.





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knowledge is enlarging steadily. Put briefly, the answer to the English woman is: "Yes, probably natural childbirth is easier for the Indian woman than for the westerner, but the frequency of abnormal childbirth is immensely greater in India; the diseases that are contracted at the time of childbirth through the ignorance and the carelessness of attendants are responsible for the crippling of thousands of lives; the death-rate of Indian women during or immediately after the birth of children is reckoned as from six to eight times as high as that in western countries; and the death-rate of infants in their first year is from two to six times as high."\* The reply to the protest of the Indian woman is best made in the form of the question: "How many of the fifteen are still alive?" Her reply (and the reply of hundreds like her) reveals an unnecessary loss of life that appals the hearer, but it fails to convince her that any new way can be better than the old. To her the death of children has no connection with the conditions of their birth or nurture, but belongs to a mysterious world of destiny unconnected with physical causes.

A large number of different traditions and circumstances combine to create unwholesome conditions and to uphold them. Ignorance alone is responsible for much, but the religious sanction that is given to many ancient customs is a more serious obstacle in the way of improvement than ignorance is. And the fact that the familiar usages, even where there may be no definite religious idea symbolized in them, are linked up with all that is sacred to the mother, makes it extremely difficult for her to break away from the past or to accept any change of method.

The early age of marriage in India is responsible for much debility amongst women, and for much mortality at the time of childbirth. This cause, however, does not specially concern the present study, because working women, as a rule, are later in marrying than those of

\* For all India the average death-rate of children under one year of age is one in four or one in five, but in certain centres it rises to one in two and even to three in five. In Britain it is rather under one in ten.



higher castes, and though, even amongst the mill workers, there may be many young mothers, the proportion of them is not so great as it is amongst women in purdah. Another cause for lack of stamina in infants is that the vitality of both parents has been undermined by fever. In some districts new-born infants contract malaria so soon after birth that it has been discussed by medical authorities whether it is possible to be born with parasites already in the system. But perhaps the chief cause of serious illness and of death is the type of midwife that is employed throughout India. Special efforts have been made to influence and to train hereditary dhais,<sup>1</sup> but the difficulties that have attended these attempts have been very great. The hereditary midwife is, in many districts, a member of the barber caste,<sup>2</sup> and is closely linked up with the family life of her patients. She is necessary not only at the time of birth, but also during the preliminaries to marriage, as it is she who negotiates between the families of bride and bridegroom.

The conditions of women in time of illness, and especially the unnecessary suffering and death at the time of childbirth, had been recognized for some time before Lady Dufferin, at the request of Queen Victoria, founded The Countess of Dufferin's Fund to provide women doctors and trained midwives for the women of India in 1885. A few medical missionaries were already practising in the country, and their number increased<sup>3</sup> as new facilities were opened. The experience of the pioneer doctors in Mission and in Dufferin hospitals and dispensaries added rapidly to the knowledge of the tragic sufferings from preventible causes endured by women and children. It was found that many of the cases that were brought to hospital after childbirth had

<sup>1</sup> Dhais or dais, midwives.

<sup>2</sup> In Nagpur a larger proportion of dhais belong to the Mangs than to the barber caste. The Mangs form one of the two chief outcaste classes in the Deccan. The other is that of the Mahars.

<sup>3</sup> In 1920 there were one hundred and twenty-five hospitals staffed by women doctors in India. Of these twenty-two were staffed by members of the Women's Medical Service, seventy-one by medical missionaries, and thirty-two by women doctors not directly connected either with the Dufferin Fund or with Missions.





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been so mishandled that the patient was beyond help. Attempts were made to train women of higher castes to do the work of midwives and nurses, but the number was entirely inadequate for the work, and frequently women were unwilling to avail themselves of their help. In 1903 the Victoria Memorial Scholarships Fund was inaugurated by Lady Curzon to encourage the training of hereditary dhais in the simplest necessary knowledge for their work, but the effort met with great opposition, and made very slow progress. The fact that members of other classes of the community had already been trained by The Countess of Dufferin's Fund had made the barber dhais fear organized training. They were inclined to think that attendance at classes would put them in the power of those who would eventually deprive them of their livelihood. The rules, simple as they were, to which they had to conform, were irksome to them, and in most centres very few came forward to be taught. Amongst those who did come many were over fifty years of age, some were seventy. There were deaf women and blind women. They were all illiterate, and they were all convinced that they stood in need of no instruction with regard to the treatment of normal childbirth. In some places, however, successful classes were formed.

As early as 1885 classes for the training of hereditary dhais had been inaugurated by Miss Hewlett,<sup>1</sup> a missionary in Amritsar, for in this, as in other lines of social reform in India, missionaries were pioneers. One important feature of Miss Hewlett's method was that dhais were not only trained for a period of time and provided with simple outfits, but were also continuously supervised, and a small reward was granted for each successful case. That experiment has been adopted by the more successful branches of dhais' training, and seems to be the only method that gives a satisfactory result.

At the commencement of a similar experiment in Nagpur under Dr. Agnes Henderson,<sup>2</sup> a special inquiry was made. One thousand cases of childbirth were

<sup>1</sup> Church of England Zenana Missionary Society, Amritsar.

<sup>2</sup> United Free Church of Scotland Mission Hospital, Nagpur.



investigated. They were selected from amongst "rich and poor, progressive and backward." Only forty-two of these were attended by trained midwives or by doctors. A small number were attended by untrained relatives, and more than nine hundred were attended by untrained hereditary dhais.<sup>1</sup> When these investigations had been completed, the Mang dhais were asked to attend classes and to report the cases that they attended. They were given four annas for each case in which an inspecting nurse found both mother and child well, besides receiving a sum varying from eight annas to one rupee monthly for attendance. They were also encouraged to send their children, especially their daughters, to school, and as an inducement to do this they were paid an anna for each day's attendance for a daughter, and half an anna for a son! The following quotation summarizes the ideal that is kept in mind in Nagpur :

"The idea at present is not so much to give a definite course of instruction to dhais, examine them, give them certificates, and let them pass out, but rather to keep in touch from year to year with all the dhais who are willing to come, inspect their cases, give them simple instruction for some weeks annually, have talks with them on current topics . . . or any special difficulty in connection with the maternity cases reported by them ; and also to get into touch with their children.

"They are asked to provide themselves with a very simple kit. . . . These articles are offered for sale on the monthly or quarterly pay-day. About thirty dhais have purchased them, and possibly about one-third of that number really use them regularly. Occasionally prizes are given to those whose hands and nails are cleanest."<sup>2</sup>

It is not difficult to understand that even such simple demands as are suggested in the foregoing summary seem drastic to midwives who are entirely ignorant of the value of any precautions. Even if no further

<sup>1</sup> Mang dhais attended five hundred and fifty-nine cases ; barber dhais three hundred and twenty-nine ; untrained hereditary dhais of other castes were in attendance in other cases

<sup>2</sup> See *Improvement of the Conditions of Childbirth in India*, Calcutta, Superintendent Government Printing, India, p. 157.



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obstacles had had to be overcome, the battle for better methods would necessarily be long and arduous. But when it is further realized that all new methods, and especially all attempts at cleanliness, are looked at with suspicion by the patients and by their friends, are resented, and are even made the causes of the dismissal of the dhais, the real difficulties in the way of progress become apparent.

During the time of childbirth and for ten<sup>1</sup> days afterwards a woman is looked on as ceremonially impure. Nothing that is touched by her during that period can be used again. It must be burned or broken. The oldest rags, and these generally received from neighbours (for no one of her own family may supply her with anything), are all that the midwives are expected to use, and as the fear of contamination is absent, the garments are dirty as well as old and torn.

The ceremonial requirements also involve the shutting away of the mother for the period of ten days<sup>1</sup> from all intercourse with others. If there is open ground round the home, a small rude hut may be erected for her, but in many cases a strip of the living-room is walled off, and there, in stifling air without light except for faint glimmerings that may penetrate at curtain or door, with no bed, with no sheets, the midwife has to give what assistance she can to the patient. Sometimes a recess is built for this purpose. The average size is six feet long by four feet wide with a roof that slopes from four feet in height to two feet.

In the houses of hand-loom weavers the long groove<sup>2</sup> hollowed in the earthen floor in which the weaver sits while at work is sometimes used as the bed of the

<sup>1</sup> Among lower caste people and outcastes, women may be back at work on the second day after the birth of a child. In many castes which are represented amongst mill workers the period is forty days. "There is no idea of 'pollution' amongst Christians, but they observe approximately the same periods of abstention from work as are prevalent locally among the corresponding class of Hindus." Extract from a letter from the Acting Secretary to the Government of Madras, Revenue Department, in reply to letters from the Secretary, Board of Industries and Munitions, Simla, dated August 5, 1920. See *Bulletins of Indian Industries and Labour*, No. 10, p. 82.

<sup>2</sup> The frame of the primitive hand loom is placed across the hollow, is supported by the ground on either side, and is easily removed.



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Expectant mother. Odd broken baskets, matting, and rough firewood may be lying in confusion close at hand, still further obstructing light and air.<sup>1</sup>

Conditions are still further complicated by the fact that in many details the customary methods tend to produce blood-poisoning in mothers and in infants. In the latter case tetanus frequently ensues, and in some districts the number of deaths due to this one disease is very great.<sup>2</sup> In places in which it has been found possible to introduce trained midwives working under supervision, the death rate from this cause has dropped suddenly.

The training centres for dhais inaugurated by the Victoria Memorial Scholarships Fund have been opened, for the most part, in cities in Northern India. The Presidencies of Bombay and Madras are not included in the scheme. In Bengal, where no supervision was attempted, little benefit resulted. Thus the larger industrial areas, with the exception of Nagpur, have scarcely been affected by its activities. The maternity hospitals in Bombay, Calcutta, and Madras, are quite inadequate for the inhabitants of these cities, and few women of the labouring classes will take advantage of them except in acute illness.

Writing of the Factory Act of 1911, Mr. Burnett-Hurst<sup>3</sup> expresses regret that no attempt was made to introduce legislation to improve the conditions of women workers at the time of childbirth.<sup>4</sup>

The omission is easily explained.

A very general feeling existed that conditions in mills were not in this respect far different from those in which women worked in other occupations. The difficulty of interfering in the private lives of the workers was realized.

<sup>1</sup> In the house visited, in which the weaver's seat was used as a bed, there was only a slight barricade between it and the rest of the room, and no real privacy.

<sup>2</sup> See Report made by the Sanitary Commissioner of the United Provinces for the year 1916, quoted in *Improvement of the Conditions of Childbirth in India*, Calcutta, Superintendent Government Printing, India, p. 81.

<sup>3</sup> See "Suggestions for Labour Legislation in India," by A. R. Burnett-Hurst, B.Sc., F.S.S., *Indian Journal of Economics*, vol. iii, part iv, p. 497.

<sup>4</sup> See *Women in the Factory*, by Adelaide Mary Anderson, D.B.E., M.A., formerly His Majesty's Principal Lady Inspector of Factories, pp. 149 f., for an account of legislation on this subject in Great Britain.





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Trained Indian women ready to take part in welfare work of that kind were difficult to find. In many places there was grave uncertainty with regard to the reception that such women would get even if they were ready and willing to undertake the work.<sup>1</sup>

Those already interested in social conditions, however, continued their efforts on behalf of the women towards whom their sympathies were enlisted. The Labour Conference in Washington in 1919 changed the general outlook entirely. Articles 3 and 4 of the Draft Convention on this subject run as follows :—

“Article 3.—In any public or private industrial or commercial<sup>2</sup> undertaking, or in any branch thereof other than an undertaking in which only members of the same family are employed, a woman

- (a) Shall not be permitted to work during the six weeks following her confinement.
- (b) Shall have the right to leave her work if she produces a medical certificate stating that her confinement will probably take place within six weeks.
- (c) Shall, while she is absent from her work in pursuance of paragraphs (a) and (b) be paid benefits sufficient for the full and healthy maintenance of herself and her child, provided either out of the public funds or by means of a system of insurance, the exact amount of which shall be determined by the competent authority in each country, and as an additional benefit shall be

\* “These posts are many of them isolated, and though fairly well paid, do not attract women Sub-Assistant Surgeons, the majority of whom are Indian Christians, and who would be away from their own community and unprotected in these inaccessible places. It is difficult to see how this can be remedied. Medical women are often more urgently needed in these isolated posts than in towns where other institutions exist; and yet it would not be right to force women to go there, unless adequately protected and accompanied by some members of their own family, or a trained compounder or nurse to act as assistant.”—See Report by Dr. Agnes C. Scott, W.M.S.I., Assistant to the Inspector-General of Civil Hospitals, Punjab, in the Annual Report of the National Association for Supplying Female Medical Aid to the Women of India, p. 30.

<sup>2</sup> This is the only Draft Convention adopted by the Washington Conference that applies to commercial as well as to industrial undertakings.



entitled to free attendance by a doctor or certified midwife. No mistake of the medical adviser in estimating the date of confinement shall preclude a woman from receiving these benefits from the date of the medical certificate up to the date on which the confinement actually takes place.

(d) Shall in any case, if she is nursing her child, be allowed half an hour twice a day for this purpose.

*Article 4.*—Where a woman is absent from her work in accordance with paragraphs (a) or (b) of Article 3 of this Convention, or remains absent from her work for a longer period as a result of illness medically certified to arise out of pregnancy or confinement and rendering her unfit for work, it shall not be lawful, until her absence shall have exceeded a maximum period to be fixed by the competent authority in each country, for her employer to give her notice of dismissal during such absence, nor to give her notice of dismissal at such a time that the notice would expire during such absence."

It was not expected, however, that this Convention would be applied to India at once. The resolution was passed: "That the Indian Government be requested to make a study of the question of the employment of women before and after confinement, and of maternity benefits, before the next Conference, and to report on these matters to the next Conference."

The immediate action of the Indian Government was to send out a list of inquiries<sup>1</sup> to the representatives of Local Governments in various provinces, and to appoint a lady adviser to the Board of Industries. Miss Gladys Broughton, whose services were secured for this post, has summarized in various articles<sup>2</sup> much of the infor-

<sup>1</sup> See *Bulletins of Indian Industries and Labour*, No. 10, pp. 2 f.

<sup>2</sup> See "Welfare Work in Indian Mills and Factories," *Journal of Indian Industries and Labour*, vol. ii, part iii. "Short Account of the All-India Industrial Welfare Conference 1922," "Welfare Superintendents and their Training," "Organizations for the Promotion of Industrial Welfare Work, etc.," by G. M. Broughton, M.A., O.B.E.





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information that she has accumulated by personal visits to industrial areas, and from reports of others.

The activity inaugurated by the Government in connection with the Washington Labour Conference was only one of many results arising from the findings of that Conference. The subjects discussed were brought sharply before the thoughts of men and women in India. A wide public was reached. Certain leaders of Nationalist thought quickly realized the value to the nation of increased health amongst its women and children, and, grasping one or two essential points, moved forward to demand an extensive programme of change, in order to secure in rapid ways higher standards of vitality for the nation.

Here, as in so many other directions, it is a much simpler thing for those who have, to some extent, broken away from traditional customs and ways of looking at things in their own country to demand that others shall be forced to do so, than for a Government composed largely of members of another race to break down usages by force of law. It may be questioned whether those who so eagerly write in Indian magazines and pamphlets demanding the most drastic reforms,<sup>1</sup> have seriously thought out the difficulties that must be overcome. It is to be doubted whether their arguments would withstand the opposition that would confront sudden efforts to change the outlook of the workers, even if the latter could be reached by them, but the fact that these demands are made and that discussion of the points raised by them is now widespread throughout the reading public of India, suggests how much more rapidly change may come than would have been thought possible twenty years ago.

Reference has already been made to some of the reasons for the absence of a public opinion sufficiently strong to secure legislation bearing on the conditions of mothers at

\* "For this purpose . . . legal enactments [should be] made so as to prohibit all untrained Dhais from practising their dangerous primitive methods of midwifery."—Dr. S. Amritaraj, Health Officer, Civil and Military Station, Bangalore; in a paper submitted to the Welfare Conference held in Bombay in April 1922.



the time of childbirth, when the Act of 1911 became law. In spite of the interest aroused by the Conventions of the Washington Conference, the Act, as modified up to 1922, contains no reference to the subject. As has been noted, immediate legislation had not been expected in India. The inquiries that have been made have brought to light many facts. The consensus of opinion seems to be that notice of dismissal<sup>1</sup> because of absence at the time of childbirth is rare, and that in cases in which a mother on her return is refused<sup>2</sup> work in the mill in which she was previously employed, similar work can be obtained elsewhere. It is probable, however, that mothers who absent themselves for any longer period than the minimum one customary in the district are frequently penalized by the forfeiture of their held-back wages. It would be exceedingly difficult to introduce any kind of supervision which would effectively prevent pay clerks from treating the return of the mother as a new start.<sup>3</sup> Again, with few exceptions, much liberty seems to be granted to mothers to come and go freely while they are nursing their infants. The suggested legalized permission to leave work for half an hour<sup>4</sup> twice a day would be of little advantage in the greater number of mills, and the difficulty of enforcing it in those in which the easy-going custom has not been accepted would probably be out of all proportion to the benefit that might be gained. Clause (b) of Article 3 maintains that permission to leave work six weeks before childbirth on presentation of a medical certificate should be granted to all women workers who claim it. Even at the time of childbirth very few Indian women are willing to consult a medical man, and a much smaller number would submit to registration and certification six weeks before the event. As yet there are few women doctors whose services are available in industrial areas.

<sup>1</sup> See Article 4, p. 179.

<sup>2</sup> Mrs. Donde, in a Paper submitted to the Welfare Conference in Bombay in April 1922, draws attention to the fact that in some mills naikins do terrorize the workers, and prevent them from leaving work before childbirth and from staying away for a reasonable length of time after it by the fear that there will be no room for them when they wish to work again.

<sup>3</sup> See p. 118.

<sup>4</sup> Article 3 (d) p. 179.





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If the social custom of the group to which a worker belongs encourages a prolonged absence, women, whose relations can afford to maintain them, leave work one month or more before childbirth. In these matters pecuniary demands modify hereditary usages, and must do so while standards remain low.

Clauses (a) and (c) of Article 3 are the ones round which most discussion has centred. The former demands that women shall not be allowed to return to regular employment for six weeks after childbirth, and the latter that benefit sufficient for full maintenance of the mother during absence from work before the birth, and for full maintenance of mother and child during absence from work after the birth shall be paid.

The urgency of the need for new standards, if the health and vitality of the coming generation is to be secured, stands out against the extreme difficulty attending any sort of legislation in this matter. Those who know the need are apt to grow impatient of continued inquiries and efforts to create a new public opinion, and some of them would fain secure partial legislation immediately.

It is clear that the prohibition of women's work in factories for six weeks after childbirth would be resented as interference by the workers themselves unless benefit were paid. Such prohibition without allowance might indeed be not only an imaginary hardship but also a real one. The mere fact of depriving the family of the mother's earnings might be worse for her and for the child than if she were allowed to work and so were able to afford more nourishing food. In many cases the mother would secure work in an unregulated occupation, in which even if the actual work were not heavier, the hours would almost certainly be longer.

The difficulties of administration, whether benefit were paid or not, would render regulations ineffective. The registration of childbirth is neither inclusive nor accurate. The machinery that would be necessary in order to follow up absentees does not exist. If a woman goes home to her village her baby will be registered, if it is



registered at all, by the village accountant in its father's name only. If the mother returns to the mill within six weeks, there is no one who can be held responsible for securing the information that would justify the overseer in refusing to allow her to return to work. If she is refused work at the mill at which she was previously employed, she can go to another. If penalties were inflicted on managers for employing women in these circumstances, the natural result would be that efforts would be made to exclude women of child-bearing age from factories. This might be hailed as an advance, were it not that in many cases it would involve the lowering of standards already far from adequate, or the employment of the women in unregulated trades.

It is natural to ask whether a benefit scheme would not obviate many of the difficulties raised above. There is little doubt that the resentment caused by interference would disappear, but it is doubtful whether the receipt of an allowance would prevent mothers from undertaking work other than factory work until education is much more widely diffused. The difficulty of securing evidence, especially with regard to those mothers who go to the mofussil for the period of childbirth, would still remain. The illiteracy of the workers would cause further complications about the payment of the allowance. Unless an accurate address were left behind, remittances might never reach the mother. A lump sum awaiting her return would be of no value for the provision of nourishment during the most important period. The difficulties may seem trivial in themselves, but when they are multiplied indefinitely, and when the cost of inspection is taken into consideration, the result is not trivial.

When attention is turned to the study of the resources from which a benefit fund could be secured, new perplexities arise. The poverty of the workers makes it unreasonable to expect that they should contribute to any appreciable extent. If the entire burden were placed on employers, it is almost certain that they would gradually cease to employ women of child-bearing age.





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The State could scarcely subsidize one selected industry by taking on itself responsibility for maternity benefit for factory workers, unless it were prepared to assume a similar responsibility for all women who work for wages. At a time when retrenchment is demanded, such a costly proposal could have little hope of support.

In view of the difficulties already outlined, and of others that would arise, the judgment of many of those who have gone most deeply into this matter is that the path of advance meanwhile is not along the line of new legislation. It is urged that employers should be encouraged to make experiments in the direction of maternity benefit, and of free medical and maternity attendance. Some interesting schemes are being worked out in different neighbourhoods. Where a mill has the kind of atmosphere that makes workers stick to it, it is possible for the management to do a great deal more in the way of welfare work than in mills where workers are more migratory. In the former case, the mill itself will reap the benefit in stronger and more contented workers and in a healthier rising generation, and employers who are far-sighted realize this and are glad to prepare for it.

Article 3 (c) deals not only with maternity benefit, but also with the need the workers have for free attendance from doctors and midwives. In India no legislation insisting on such provisions could be carried into operation at present. But great hope for the future of the health of the people rests with those who seek to supply these needs in voluntary ways. In the autumn of 1921, Dr. Dagmar Florence Curjel,<sup>1</sup> in Bengal, and Dr. F. D. Barnes,<sup>1</sup> in Bombay, were asked to make inquiries and to formulate schemes for the provision of medical aid to women in factories. In the United Provinces and in the Punjab the Inspector-General of Civil Hospitals is assisted by a medical woman, who, in

<sup>1</sup> See "The Care of Women and Children in Indian Industries," and "The Reproductive Life of Indian Women," by Dagmar F. Curjel, M.D., D.P.H., W.M.S.; and "Final Report of the Lady Doctor," by F. D. Barnes, M.D., W.M.S., in the *Labour Gazette*, September 1922, p. 31.



each case, was asked to give part of her time to a similar inquiry. The Local Government of the United Provinces has appointed a medical woman as Assistant to the Sanitary Commissioner at Cawnpore, and proposals to appoint medical women as factory inspectors have been widely discussed.

The All-India Industrial Welfare Conference which met in Bombay in 1922 passed the resolution on maternity and infant welfare, that

“ This Conference is of opinion that the foundation of all medical welfare work depends upon an efficient midwifery service and the education of the mother, and that the best means to secure these objects should be considered by local committees consisting of medical and social workers with knowledge of local conditions, and that the recommendations of such committees should be submitted to the employers. The question of maternity clinics and homes must follow and should be arranged for according to the financial support given to the entire scheme by the various agencies already at work, and by the employers. Crèches should be provided in every factory employing women.”

The progress of education where so many prejudices have to be overcome is slow, but there are many signs that the most uphill period is already past. Dr. Kamalakar, in the report of the Dufferin Hospital, Nagpur, for 1920, draws attention to the fact that though in 1919 the custom of giving one rupee to each mother who came to the hospital for her confinement was abandoned, yet the number who came was one hundred and thirty seven in comparison to one hundred and five who had come in the previous year. In the following year, the one under report, the number had risen to one hundred and sixty. Similar reports of gradually increasing confidence come from many other quarters.

The publicity that has been created by Government inquiries with regard to the conditions of childbirth in industrial areas has brought out into greater prominence the work of those who during the last ten or twelve years have inaugurated welfare centres for women and



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children.<sup>1</sup> In the year 1921, the Lady Chelmsford All-India League for Maternity and Child Welfare was founded, not only to establish branches of the League itself, but in the hope that it would also "stimulate, assist, and co-ordinate" earlier local enterprises with similar ends in view.

It is obvious that work for the betterment of the conditions of childbirth and of childhood in India cannot be concentrated round mills only. The history of the developments of maternity and child welfare centres has until quite lately shown little consciousness of the special needs of industrial areas. The welfare centres<sup>2</sup> already opened vary greatly in the number of departments they cover, and in the social standing of the mothers who attend them. At least one centre in South India is run by women of some leisure and means, in order that they may get advice and instruction, and is rather an educational than a welfare centre. It is interesting to notice in the account of this centre<sup>3</sup> that the members bring their babies on Saturday, week by week, to be examined and weighed, and are willing to submit to practical guidance as well as to listen to lectures. Few things would help forward educational work more than the opening of such centres in many areas. From their members, workers ready to take their share in passing on the knowledge they have gained to others in poorer circumstances might be expected to rise. These women would know from their own experience the inner life of the Indian mother, would understand where strange though valuable methods jarred most painfully on customary thought, and they in their turn would come to understand something of the pressure of the poverty in which so many of their sisters live.

In Calcutta, though no centre<sup>4</sup> has been opened for leisured women, lectures by women doctors have been

\* The Lady Willingdon Scheme in Bombay; the Child Welfare Scheme of the Corporation of Madras, and others.

<sup>2</sup> A "Child Welfare Directory" is given on pp. 98 f. of the journal published by the Lady Chelmsford All-India League for Maternity and Child Welfare in India, vol. i, No. 2, June 1921.

<sup>3</sup> Bangalore Mahila Seva Samaja Welfare Centre.

<sup>4</sup> Four centres have been opened for working women in 1923.



inaugurated. In some cases these are given to purdah ladies in private houses; in others to a more general audience in girls' schools and colleges. In that city, too, a Women's Society of Social Workers has been formed.

Generally speaking, maternity and child welfare centres are opened in the poorest and most crowded parts of the large cities. They work in co-operation with the hospitals and maternity homes, and with corporation dispensaries, and seek to devote themselves as much as possible to preventive and educational work. Though only the very poor come to the classes and talks that are held at these centres, the maternity nurses who go out to cases are often in great demand amongst those who are well able to pay private fees. Under the Madras Child Welfare Scheme a rule has been made that its midwives may only<sup>1</sup> visit women in homes where the income is less than a hundred rupees a month.<sup>2</sup> It is a difficult rule to carry out. The messenger is so willing to change the amount of the income rather than miss the service of the free nurse. Dr. Virasinghe notes in a report: "Z, a Hindu, wished to have a nurse for his aunt, income Rs. 250 per mensem; informed him of our rules. His reply was, 'Oh! my uncle is a small merchant, perhaps his income is much less than Rs. 100 per mensem.' He was on the point of scoring out the income he had written on the calls' register, and of writing something much lower, when I politely informed him that he could easily write an untruth and command the services of a free nurse, but as a member of the public he was not helping us to restrict our work to those for whom only it was intended. After a few minutes' thought he left the centre, agreeing to make his own arrangements."<sup>3</sup> But all are not so easily persuaded, and some stand on their rights as ratepayers, though they base their demand for free nursing on a figure openly reduced from its original amount.

<sup>1</sup> Except in cases of extreme urgency.

<sup>2</sup> Report of the "Child Welfare Scheme" of the Corporation of Madras, October 1919-December 1920, p. 17.

<sup>3</sup> Report by L. N. Virasinghe (now Mrs. Virasinghe Chinappa), M.B.B.S., Lady Superintendent of the Child Welfare Scheme, Corporation of Madras.





A far more serious difficulty obstructs the work of the maternity nurse and the woman doctor in the reluctance that is found to trust any one adviser. The nurse from the centre is called in only to find later that a midwife has already been engaged, may indeed be hidden away in some corner out of sight ready to come to the front again when the help of the centre-trained nurse has been secured.

The centres of the Infant Welfare Society<sup>1</sup> in Bombay increased from two to five in the year 1921, and the attendances at all numbered ninety-three thousand three hundred and five. One of the centres added in that year was opened in rooms lent by the Improvement Trust in chawls tenanted by Mahars;<sup>2</sup> while one of the earlier established ones<sup>3</sup> numbered many caste mill workers amongst the women who attended its clinics. Its nurses visited a limited area, and under the direction of Dr. Dadabhoy, kept interesting records of the conditions they found.

In these Bombay centres the battle against time-honoured traditions has been less strenuous than had been expected, and mothers have been found quick to respond. It is possible that the extremely high rate of infant mortality<sup>4</sup> there has broken down timidities that might otherwise have been more powerful. It is probable, too, that the immense immigration<sup>5</sup> of country folk into conditions entirely unlike their accustomed ones, breaks down so many customs and taboos that one more or less matters little. Here and elsewhere, continued patience, tact and sympathy, simplicity of methods, gentleness, and absence of hustle on the part of the workers, tell in the long run.

In the resolution<sup>6</sup> already quoted, the final clause is: "Crèches should be provided in every factory employing women."

<sup>1</sup> Founded in 1919.

<sup>2</sup> Untouchables. See p. 87.

<sup>3</sup> Sleater Road Welfare Centre.

<sup>4</sup> Six hundred and sixty-six per thousand, in 1921.

<sup>5</sup> While the actual numbers that enter Calcutta may be as great, they are scattered over a much wider area.

<sup>6</sup> Resolution passed by the All-India Welfare Conference which met in Bombay, April 1922, see p. 185.



Section 46 of the Indian Factories Act of 1911 has remained unaltered in the Act as amended in 1922. It runs as follows :—

“ If a child over the age of six years is found inside any room or part of a factory in which room or part children are employed, and in which any manufacturing process or work incidental to any manufacturing process is being carried on, he shall, until the contrary is proved, be deemed to be employed in the factory.”

A strong effort was made to alter this section to :—

“ If a child over the age of six years is found in any factory or within the precincts thereof, he shall, until the contrary is proved, be deemed to be employed in the factory.”

The motives that inspired those who demanded the change are discussed in another connection.<sup>1</sup> The immediate point here is that no serious effort was made to introduce a clause forbidding the presence of young children in mills.

It was generally felt that however undesirable the surroundings might be, any legal interference was impossible until a large proportion of mills provide crèches for children, or until it becomes customary for mothers with young children to stay away from work. As the law stands, mothers may bring their children from two or three days old into the working sheds with them, or leave them in odd corners of other mill buildings, or in the open compound. In a very large number of mills little groups of children are seated on the floor, or single ones are dotted beside their mother's machine, or lie sound asleep in rough canvas hammocks swung up below the machinery or on a cross bar near it. A few more energetic little ones play with empty bobbins, but far more frequently there is an unnatural stillness. Quiet little brown figures sit cross-legged and gaze out on a world that rouses no answering vitality. More frequently still, nothing is seen except a black head veiled by fluff and the outline of a little body under a rough cloth on the ground or in the depth of a hammock. The

<sup>1</sup> See p. 231 f.



latter is made of any piece of cloth of a reasonable size. The two corners at each end are caught together and attached to a bar or hook, and the baby lies deep in the hollow, only to be seen by those who peer down through the narrow space between the edges of the cloth.

Even where there are crèches<sup>1</sup> the women are often reluctant to leave their babies there. They like to have them under their own eyes, or in a place where they can go to them without having to enter the orderly nursery and be under the eye of the matron in charge. In some cases the drastic method is followed of dismissing the women if they will not use the crèche. In many mills great freedom is granted to mothers to go in and out, either to the crèche if there is one, or to their homes if these are near, to nurse their babies. Even though a neighbour may say: "But, Sahib, she has no baby," a manager may reply, "Never mind, let her go," rather than seem to be hard. On the other hand, this easy good nature does not prevail everywhere. References are made by Mrs. Sarswatibai Donde to the unreasonable demand of naikins in this respect. In many cases the only alternative to bringing the children to the mill is to give them into the care of a relative too old or too feeble to work, to lock them into the cell-like room which is all there is for a home, or to leave them in the lanes and courts in the care of one of the children between six and twelve. The care of the younger ones may act as a certain safeguard to those slightly older, but a question will rise sometimes about the conditions and surroundings of the children from six to twelve! Though much of the placidity of the Indian infant persists through childhood, there is in the life of many boys and girls a brief period during which the energy and mischief so closely associated with the thought of youth in the west appear. But these exceptions only lead the thought back to the

<sup>1</sup> The crèches referred to here are crèches within mill compounds, or close to their gates. There are other types of crèche in many places. There are crèches supported by municipalities for the children of working mothers, as in Bangalore, and crèche-orphanages, as in Baroda. Cf. *Child Welfare in India*, vol. ii, No. 3, p. 144; *Ibid.*, vol i, No. 4, p. 161.



as normal stillness that usually prevails. It is only necessary to think for a moment of what would happen in the machinery sheds in mills in England, if numbers of British children were let loose in them, to realize how great the placidity of the Indian child is. Besides this stillness, there is frequently an extraordinary look of debility about very young children. In the streets of a city like Bombay a stranger to India, who is accustomed to take note of social conditions, finds the question continually rising in the mind: "What is the matter with the babies?" Various causes combine to lower physical vitality, but one perhaps should be specially noted here. The custom of giving opium to children from the age of two months to two years is general throughout a large part of India, and in certain areas it prevails to a very serious extent. Women who are in constant occupation are more tempted than others to use any means to keep their babies quiet. If asked, they will acknowledge that it is given, and say: "It must be." In many cases hunger is a principal cause for the giving of opium. Mothers may have a sufficient supply of milk for two or three months only, but they persist in feeding their children for two years or more.<sup>1</sup> A tiny opium pill is mixed with a little of the mother's milk, or slipped beneath a thumb-nail which the baby is then allowed to suck. Under the influence of this the child is left to sleep, and when the next feeding time comes it may be too drowsy to suck. Thus a vicious circle is formed under the action of which many a little one fades away, or yields to bronchial trouble, the evil effects of which are greatly increased by the use of the drug. It is difficult to keep such babies alive for the first two years. If they survive that period, and are able to get nourishment from a more varied diet, they grow stronger for, as the crying ceases, the mother stops giving opium.

As in efforts for the reform of customs connected with childbirth, so in the introduction of crèches one of the

<sup>1</sup> It is a common custom to continue breast feeding till another living child is born. In some cases children of five or seven are not completely weaned.



most urgent needs is to secure the best hygienic conditions with the smallest departure from simple Indian surroundings and ways of life. In the bare, well-ventilated shed that is set apart for the crèche, a mat on the ground for the older children and hammock beds for the infants will give all the furniture that is needed. It is interesting to note, however, that even if the hammock made of a piece of cloth is still used, it hangs on a stand from four separate hooks, and thus no longer closes in above the child, but leaves the little one lying with open space above it to which the air has full entrance, and from which flies are excluded by a meshed muslin curtain. Flat open baskets are strongly recommended for home use, but do not seem to have been widely adopted in crèches as yet.

It is in the bathroom accommodation that it is most difficult to retain simplicity and yet secure healthy conditions. Where the bathing of babies, the washing of bottles, and the heating of milk have all to be carried on in a small imperfectly paved shed attached to the main rooms of the crèche, and when the water is only partially carried away by a sluggish flow in an open drain, the surrounding area is apt to get sodden, and a sour smell hangs about the place.

In many crèches mothers are allowed to come at any hour to nurse their babies, or even just to look in on them, but as has been noted, there is still much reluctance to take advantage of such nurseries. When the great diversity of customs and traditions that are represented is remembered, it seems more wonderful that progress should be made as it is, than that many still shrink from trusting an unknown nurse or ayah. The dislike of the Hindu to trust a Muslim nurse, or of a Muslim to trust a Hindu ayah, and the dread of unknown customs, yield slowly. The daily or weekly bath that is part of the programme in many crèches is sometimes resented, for though the Hindu caste woman is scrupulous about her daily bath, it is not usual to bathe little children, who are rubbed all over with oil instead.

Crèches in mills are sometimes inaugurated by the



management and controlled by it directly or through the doctor of the mill. In other cases, outside agencies such as the Social Service League in Bombay, or the Ladies' Council in Ahmedabad are invited to make arrangements for the supervision of the crèche, while the firm supplies rooms and a larger or smaller share of the expense. The latter method brings in a wider circle of interest, but the former has elements of stability of its own. A firm is not likely to take the trouble to make and carry out plans for such a bit of work and then let it lapse, whereas when an outside agency enters it is quite possible that, if difficulties arise, the workers may have to be withdrawn, and the whole enterprise may suffer. The visible progress of such experiments is so slow that the enthusiasm with which they are started is apt to cool.

In one mill, where the nursery room was unsatisfactory, a large shed next door bore the word "Crèche" in bold letters. The children had been turned out of this good building at a time when trade was dull in order that finished goods might be stored in it. Trade had ceased to be dull, but bales of cloth still stood where the cradles had been! The fact that the playground, to which access could easily have been arranged from the smaller room, was in a state of desolation, with one swing down and the ropes of the other frayed and knotted, and with broken cases and barrels surrounding the slide and covering the last vestiges of sand, suggested that the painting of the name and the arranging of the playground had been undertaken under the influence of a passing wave of public opinion. In the city where that mill stood there was a pretty general consciousness of what might be expected in the way of welfare work, perhaps because of continued and successful work by a certain number of its firms.

The most attractive crèches were those where the work was not only for infants, but where older children, sometimes sharing the daily bath and sometimes retaining only the privilege of playing in the verandahs, were encouraged to stay in the building or in the garden attached to it and look after the little ones.





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The ayahs in charge not only superintend the crèches, but are expected to encourage the mothers to bring their babies. In some places they watch the incoming workers at the mill gate and go into the working sheds to ask mothers to send their children, or to find out why any child is missing, and much of the success of the nursery depends on their tact. Where qualified nurses are in charge the work of the crèche assumes some of the characteristics of a welfare centre.

There was, until 1922, one department in jute mills in which it seemed uncertain whether or not the law permitted children under nine to work. It was the sack-sewing department, when it occupied a separate shed divided off from all machinery.<sup>1</sup> The wording of the Act of 1911 did not expressly cover this, and it is perhaps natural when children work in so many trades in India in entirely unregulated conditions that some employers should see no harm in allowing those who come with their mothers to sew when they wish to. The rough jute bags are heavy work to put into little hands "as soon as they can hold a needle," and the sight of a tiny girl who "could do as much as a grown woman" and would earn three or four pence for it, does not seem more reasonable because millions of other boys and girls are working as hard elsewhere. The great majority of occupations in India are not governed by any kind of legislation, and in these children may begin to work at any age. Quite tiny children manage to make cigarettes as fast as their parents, and work for many hours a day. Even if it is true from the manager's point of view that the children are allowed to come and go as they like, and that no compulsion is put on them to work longer than they will, it has always to be remembered that the home pressure may be very strong. The picturesqueness of the sight of a group of little Rajputana boys working at carpet making, does not lessen the tragic significance. The carpet hung from the roof of a bright open shed,

<sup>1</sup> Sect. 3 (b) of the amended Act gives Local Governments power to notify as a "factory" any premises in which on any one day of the year, ten persons are employed, whether mechanical or electrical power be used or not. See p. 233, note.



and the boys sat on a low bench and worked at the hanging edge, pulling coloured threads through the foundation to form the nap. Behind the carpet stood a man who sang out, in a sort of chant, the colours of the threads that were to come into the next row, as the children worked. Each time as he chanted out his song of the order of the colours, the leading boy repeated it from the other side, and the tiny hands went on pulling threads through. This is a blind-alley occupation. Children are engaged for it because their fingers are much more adaptable than those of older people, so that unless a boy is quick enough to become a foreman and guide the work of others, he must drop out when he develops into a man. These boys were working at the carpet for about eleven hours a day.

In the south again, numbers of what might almost be called babies work at the picking of coffee-beans. The beans are dried and prepared for sale in every way except that the sizes are mixed together and some beans are less fully developed than others. It is on separating out the small and the slightly mal-formed beans from the better ones that the groups of women and children are employed. The work, light as it is, seems rather skilled for such tiny children. The picture of such a shed with similar groups of children in the west suggests beans scattered in every direction and scooped up again indiscriminately by the grass tray-shovels into which they are separated out. But there, quiet and order reigned.

The question rises: "What is India going to do about her children?" Her reformers have grasped much of the latest thought on child welfare, on the relation of the child to the State, on the need for education of a more vital kind than any country in the world has yet bestowed on its future citizens. They have grasped, too, something of the waste of life and energy that at present goes on almost unchecked. They know that this is partly due to prejudice and to ignorance. They are convinced that it is greatly due to mistaken emphasis on narrow educational ideas, and they are apt to forget that in this the westerner has offered that which he thought





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best, and which he is only now beginning to question. The vision of ideals and the dissatisfaction with things as they are, exist. The immediate task is to find out in each direction the next step, and the next, and to be content to take these and to go on taking them when progress seems slow. Not the most ardent idealism, nor the most radiant enthusiasm can wave a wand over any land and create a new world within it. The clearer realization of this would prevent many a reaction that by its depressing influence retards progress.



## CHAPTER XIV

## STANDARDS OF LIVING

WHEN an attempt is made to consider present standards of life and to obtain a view of the matters in which change is imperatively needed, various perplexities arise, and a clamour of voices, seemingly contradictory, breaks on the ear. To many who seek for more reasonable social relations and conditions, the immediate demand is for the creation of new needs which by their urgency shall rouse men to secure their fulfilment. To others the ideal of a simpler life is the guide to follow. How is it possible at one and the same time to create a demand and to believe in the value of learning to do without? Paradoxical as it seems, it may turn out to be true that no one will ever learn voluntarily to do without until he has become conscious of a demand, the pursuit of which makes such abstinence more than worth while. The cult of simplicity has had votaries who have roused the criticism that it is less worth while to put simple food into the mouth of a sophisticated old man than to put any kind of food into the mouth of a simple old man. The criticism is a jest. But it is not an empty jest. It calls attention to the fact that it is the life's result in manhood that matters.

A boy on holiday is more than satisfied with a bicycle and a knapsack, but holiday is only a small part of life. Any permanent work will at once and inevitably enlarge the circle of his requirements. There must be a principle applicable to increasing demands by which they can be judged. Such a principle will probably find many expressions. For the immediate subject it may be





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suggested that valuable demands are those which have origin in the essential life of an individual or of a community and which open opportunity for the growth of that life. Spurious demands are those by which an effort is made to supply a substitute for vitality, or to cover the lack of it. It will at once be evident that many demands that are in the thoughts and on the lips of thinkers and reformers to-day might in themselves belong to either of the two categories. Their quality will depend on the programme into which they enter, and on the way in which their satisfaction is appropriated. Such considerations lead to the conclusion that neither in India nor elsewhere is it sufficient to supply good things, whether they be dispensaries, libraries, or schools, crèches, welfare centres, or trade unions. There must be behind and through all effort a realization of its relation to the developing life of peoples and of individuals.

The reformer will welcome the increase of needs because through them he sees men feeling out towards higher levels of human life. He will give his labour towards the attainment of those particular advances which seem to hold most for the future, a future that shall not lack simplicity. He will seek to create a demand for the highest things so strong that he himself and others whom he inspires will learn to do without an increasing number of things that at one time seemed necessary, in order to secure the best.

Gandhi, the great Indian prophet of simplicity, in a skit on British characteristics, writes: "They have a habit of writing history. They pretend to study the manners and customs of all peoples. God has given us a limited mental capacity, but they usurp this and indulge in novel experiments. They write about their own researches in most laudatory terms, and hypnotize us into believing them. We in our ignorance then fall at their feet." His words recall the familiar tendency to think that social and political conditions in the world to-day are too complicated for the brain of man. But there is no excuse for yielding to such a temptation till a very much larger proportion of the world's brain power



has freed itself from the domination of personal, national, and professional interests, has devoted itself to world problems, and has acknowledged defeat. The "habit of writing history" of which Gandhi complains may turn out to be a not unimportant factor among many others working towards the consciousness of race-unity and the pursuit of human progress.

The "lack of needs" amongst the less virile, deplored in every part of the world, is accompanied in India by a peculiar difficulty in making articulate the sense of the needs that are felt.<sup>1</sup> It may be suspected that in many circumstances the individual has only a vague feeling of dissatisfaction, which reaches no definite expression even in his own mind. This can be seen in the common contentment with inadequate wages, and also in the fact that when a sense of unrest becomes insistent, it is apt to express itself in the stereotyped demand for higher wages, without apparent knowledge of directions of expenditure. It is seen in the extent to which wages are spent on drink and gambling, and in the fact that moral standards maintained by caste regulations so readily break down in strange environment.<sup>2</sup>

In order to secure that the endeavour to create higher standards of living will proceed in wise ways, three lines of inquiry are necessary, and each of these involves the expenditure of time and energy. Yet unless they are pursued faithfully before new practical efforts are inaugurated and during the development of those efforts progress will be retarded. The object of the first inquiry is to find out what constitutes the chief needs that are consciously felt by the workers in industrial areas. When

<sup>1</sup> "Now what has been the cause of the strike? There is no doubt Gandhism was the match that lit the fire, but the fuel was already here in the shape of a long-standing, almost inarticulate sense of injustice among the workmen. Most of the things they now ask for they have been told by others to ask for. It has been one of the difficulties which the authorities have had that they have been unable to find out what the men really want. . . . But it is the underlying cause of all this that should be discovered. That, I believe, is really a want of consideration for the workmen which has for long been the order of the day."—"Industrial Unrest in Bengal," by Rev. E. B. Sharpe, *Church Missionary Review*, September 1921, p. 250.

<sup>2</sup> See p. 206, note.



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these have been discovered and examined, it will be found that they do not account for all the dissatisfaction that is experienced, and a second inquiry will be called for. This latter will seek to understand conditions and people with such sympathy that those who take part in it will be able to make vocal many of the felt but undefined desires of the workers. It may be surmised that however well and sympathetically this is done, there will still remain regions of need with regard to which there is neither conscious nor unconscious sense of lack, but the supply of which is necessary to progress and human development. In certain directions it will inevitably be found that the satisfaction of the known wants cannot come without the discovery of, and the developing satisfaction of, needs of which the workers are entirely unconscious. At the same time it seems obvious that the response to conscious needs is the natural preparation for the realization of deeper ones. The relief of the simplest pressure of circumstances on an individual may reveal the necessity for change in the attitude or in the policy of a whole community.

Though any adequate results of such inquiries as have been outlined must await intensive study, it will be helpful to suggest some of the more obvious points under each. Practical effort cannot wait for a full survey of the field. It is now in operation in many directions, and it must be judged and guided by the knowledge that is already available. It is itself a most valuable source of new knowledge. Amongst the needs of the workers, of which they seem to be most clearly conscious, perhaps the most outstanding one is for a regular supply of food, and for greater comfort in which to eat it, in the mill, in the lodging, or in the boarding-house. The fact that so large a part of wages is ear-marked before it falls due, frequently results in great shortage before the next pay day. Reference has already been made to the surroundings in which meals are eaten. Closely linked up with this is the desire for housing conditions which will secure freedom from observation and control, and which will make it possible to have some of the



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Happiness of simple family life as it is lived in and around the village hut. The longing for more leisure and for more pleasant ways of spending it, for shows, for music and for fairs is probably less clearly defined, but the immediate response to all opportunities that occur makes it clear that the limitations that crowded city life creates must be repressive. Still more vague probably is the longing for freedom from the oppression caused by debt and mortgage, and by the exactions of overseers.

Education is already at work, bringing with it the consciousness of new needs and the hope of fresh possibilities, so that no hard and fast lines can be drawn. Yet there are many localities in which the inadequacy of conditions in respects other than those just noted has not been consciously experienced. On examination it is found that supplementary needs arise at each point of felt need, and that there are yet other urgent requirements beyond. A sufficient and an evenly distributed supply of food is not all that is required. There is urgent need that the food should be suitable, and that it should be protected from adulteration and from disease germs. In many areas lentils and millet, and in others rice,<sup>1</sup> or lentils and rice, form the staple diet. The reason for this is not only poverty, though that has much to answer for in this direction. The value of ghi, of milk, and of green vegetables and fruit, is not so thoroughly realized that a varied diet smaller in quantity would be welcomed instead of the more immediately satisfying one of grain in bulk. Wherever there is open ground there is the opportunity of gathering wild herbs for curries that supply an element in diet that cannot be obtained without expenditure in the city. Flies are probably no more numerous in proportion to the size of the bazar in the city than in the village, for the reason that they could not be! But the conditions in the city tend to make the effects of the disease germs they carry more widely disastrous. The insufficiency of food is one of the causes that strengthens the temptation that awaits the worker

<sup>1</sup> In many country districts rice is too expensive for the villagers.





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in the tadi shop,\* the country spirit shop, and the shop for the sale of European spirits. The caste-Hindu and the Muslim alike are forbidden by religion to take intoxicants, and those of them who do drink lower themselves in social standing. Thus, in addition to the disastrous results of the liquor itself on poorly developed physiques there is the evil effect of such social degradation on character. The interiors of these shops, with the rarest exceptions, are bare and uninviting, and some are revolting. There is little to attract except the hope of torpor. The accounts that are heard in mining and factory areas of the extent to which wages are spent in drink strengthen the demand for the development of new recreational facilities.

It has already been emphasized that one of the great causes that retards the provision of housing accommodation that secures privacy, is the lack of sanitary knowledge and ideals amongst the dwellers. For the safety of the community supervision is necessary, and every effort to provide greater privacy must be accompanied by education in the simplest conditions of health. These things appear on the surface, but ideal homes are not to be secured by improvements in housing alone. The extent to which family life has broken down in industrial areas is not due only to external causes. If in the new communities stable social relations are to be built up, changes in the relationships between the individuals will be necessary, as well as changes in conditions. An increasing sense of the value of personality will bring with it into family life new possibilities for the development of initiative in the rising generations. Such a sense will also tend to break up the apathy that now exists with regard to illness, general debility, and premature death.

Although there is evidence that wages, whether they have risen in proportion to the cost of living or not, do not provide for the maintenance even of a full subsistence

\* Tadi is an indigenous liquor (see p. 96, note 2) which is said to do as much harm as imported spirits. It is maintained that a much larger quantity of this has been consumed of late years because the people are less "observant of religion." This statement was made in 1920. The subsequent boycott of liquor-shops reduced consumption in certain areas.



Now, there is no question that industrial life raises the possible economic status of workers in India. Those who go to the mines, to the railway workshops, to the mills, have a great deal more money than the rural workers have, even when full allowance is made for payment in kind in the case of the latter. But this can be of little use to the future of India unless it is accompanied by a steady rise in standards of living, not only in housing, food, and sanitation, but in those more subtle matters that relate to the foundations of character, and to the union of a high degree of individual independence with a well-developed sense of corporate responsibility.

It is necessary, therefore, to try to discover the effect on the character of the workers, of industrial developments at the present time, and especially on that side of character which is influenced by family relationships, and by which in turn these relationships are influenced. It is extraordinarily difficult to speak of moral conditions in mills. It is obviously unfair to judge them by western standards, and it is impossible to find Indian standards that will apply equally to any large numbers of those who work in modern industry.<sup>1</sup> Two preliminary facts must be taken into consideration. The first is that even within the same tribe or caste standards differ widely from village to village. This is not only true of the people of lower castes, but applies even to Brahman communities where the high standard maintained by one group may be in strong contrast to the lower one discovered amongst fellow Brahmans in villages only a few miles away. Amongst the jats from which workers in mill areas are drawn this is very specially true. The rules that unite a caste may be few. Additions are made to them to a greater or less extent by each village community. These additions may take the form of definite regulations or may be maintained as group usages. They are more or less binding in proportion to the united strength of the village elders. Whether the standard that gradually grows up

<sup>1</sup> "Lastly, there is the call constituted by this multitude of men . . . living often in the worst possible surroundings even from the point of view of their pre-factory life."—"Industrial Unrest in Bengal," by Rev. E. B. Sharpe, *Church Missionary Review*, September 1921, p. 258.





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be a specially high one or not, its demands are enforced pitilessly. He who goes against the public opinion of his fellow villagers is powerless. He may not draw water from the village well. No one will employ his labour. If he have land his hold on it will be in virtue of his family relationship. As an ostracized man he is shut out from work even on his own half-acre. From morning to night he is made conscious that all intercourse between him and the surrounding community, once his circle of friends, has ceased. In many places animistic fears of the powers of evil abroad in forest, ant-hill, or stunted tree, powers that may be called into operation by his offended neighbours, add subtle terror to his loneliness. If he thinks of going to another village, he knows he will have to explain himself, and even if he is tolerated at first and allowed to do coolie labour, news travels fast and he must live in constant fear of detection. In these circumstances the sturdiest rebel soon gives in, pays the fine or other penalty demanded for his offence, and is grateful to feel himself once more within the bonds of the village life. The varying standards, to which reference has already been made, differing greatly one from another as they do, are alike in this that each demands definite conditions in which a given mode of social life is preserved.

Before going on to consider the contrast that exists between such life and that lived in industrial areas, it is important to remember also that the workers in industrial areas are drawn, not only from different castes, but also from outcastes. To members of such outcaste groups migration to the mills may be the opening of life on much higher levels, but at the present stage of development their presence adds to the extraordinary medley of standards and customs that surrounds the immigrant. The question rises with insistence: What is the actual result when all these meet and to some extent mingle? Does a sort of medium standard prevail to which the least self-respecting of the depressed classes may be expected to rise, and to which it is feared that those, whose higher ideals were only strong when backed by community opinion, must inevitably fall? Or is there



appear that the main tendency will be for a general gravitation to the lowest levels and that outstanding individualities alone will find opportunity for advance? If a determination is felt to submit to neither of these, what steps must be taken to open the way for rising moral standards as well as for rising economic and physical ones? In some quarters the general impression that moral conditions in mill areas are wonderfully good on the whole prevails; an opinion, more frequently expressed, is that attempts to judge by any standards are futile, owing to the impossibility of understanding the mentality of the workers, and that if the way of living seems low, it is just what it was in the country. The affirmation and question: "No respectable<sup>1</sup> women work in the mills. I do not suppose any respectable women work in mills in England, do they?" are startling to a European, but probably express the point of view of many besides the speaker.

So much has already been said about the surroundings of labourers in cities that it should be possible to summarize the contrasts that arise between the moral conditions the villager leaves behind and those into which he enters. In the mill area he finds no unified standard of behaviour prevailing throughout the community into which he enters, and he discovers further that even where there are groups who inherit the same standards there is no power to enforce those standards.

In the village the offender could be ostracized. Here he is independent of his neighbours. His work is needed in the mill; his wages are paid to himself. The pipe from which he draws his water is under the control of the municipality or of the firm. No falling away from customary conduct can give his fellow-labourers power to prevent his use of it. In the bazar the salesmen are of many different jats, and no private fault will move them to refuse to deal with him. Even if he so deeply offends the members of his special group that they hold aloof from him, the gambling saloon, the tadi shop, and

<sup>1</sup> There is, of course the possibility of linguistic confusion here, as "respectable" may have implied high caste in the mind of the speaker.





the low recreation hall offer him society. It is true that he is not free from oppression. The overseer and the babu may tyrannize, but they interfere with him only in his working hours and through his wages. Out of the mill he is independent.

The fact that in many cases it is the stronger and more reckless that leave the country adds to the proportionate number in whom the spirit of impatience of all control breaks out. Whether the immediate impression is of a clash of standards or of an absence of standards, the result is apt to be similar, and to express itself in disregard for everything except the will of the individual. For such the breaking down of customary usages may come all at once as part of the changed conditions. For others who do not so easily escape from long habit, or on whom family and religious observances have taken a deeper hold, the process is more gradual. It begins with the realization that the ritual of home and shrine cannot be carried out in such alien and cramped conditions. With the cessation of the outward performances, the life as it was lived falls to pieces. The fatigue of the daily routine deadens the susceptibilities; and in many cases the standards of those with little initiative, lower, less rapidly it may be, but as surely as do those of the bolder spirits.<sup>1</sup>

When an effort is made to discover what really happens with regard to family loyalties in mill areas, it is found that much more is said of the moral degradation attendant on mill conditions in some places than in others, and it is difficult to know whether this is accidental and depends on the individuals who speak, on their knowledge of conditions, and on their personal way of looking at moral standards, or whether local causes are responsible for wide differences. Much more reference was made to

<sup>1</sup> Industrial conditions are bringing into clearer light the characteristics to which Max Müller referred when he wrote: "the native virtues of the Hindus are intimately connected with their village life. . . . Take a man out of his village-community and you remove him from all the restraints of society. He is out of his element, and under temptation, is more likely to go wrong than to remain true to the traditions of his home life."—*India: What Can it Teach Us?* by F. Max Müller, K.M., LL.D., pp. 48-9.



degradation in Calcutta than in Bombay. Probably this was not purely accidental. There is a reason why the conditions in Calcutta should tend to create a lower standard than those in Bombay. In Bombay a great proportion of the workers come from the same district, or from adjoining districts where the standards are comparatively similar, and they have more frequent opportunities of returning to their villages, and of keeping in touch with family life there. In Calcutta, on the other hand, many of the workers are separated by much greater distances from their homes, and groups of people so different as Punjabis and Madrasis work side by side in the mills. In the eastern city there is the further fact that a larger number of men come without their wives. But though the moral dangers connected with the crowding together of workers may be more generally known<sup>1</sup> in Bengal, those who have knowledge of conditions in Bombay are deeply impressed by the seriousness of the problems raised there. Emphasis is laid on the fate of the women workers, to whom the close, overcrowded tenements prove a gateway to a life of open prostitution. In Calcutta, on the other hand, reference is more frequently made to the degradation of the general life in the lines.

Though it is impossible to discover how far mill conditions have exaggerated tendencies that were there before, and how far they have created new evils, it is evident that there is an urgent need for the consideration of the moral dangers of these congested regions, and for the discovery of ways in which standards may be raised and by which it may be made less difficult to maintain those that already exist.

It is generally taken for granted that the women who are working in the mills do not enter them either singly or in groups of women only. "They come with their husbands or uncles or fathers."<sup>2</sup> In these little family

<sup>1</sup> This may be due in part to the fact that a much larger proportion of the workers live in lines and are therefore segregated.

<sup>2</sup> As already mentioned on p. 151, there seems to be an expectation that bodies of girl workers will come to settle at Cawnpore.





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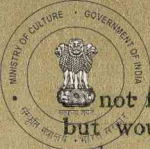
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bands odd women are found. There may be a widow or an unmarried sister of husband or wife, or there may be a young neighbour who had been married as a child, but whose husband, before she joined him, had taken a fancy to another woman. In such a case the child-wife is left in her own home. If she belongs to a caste whose rules forbid her to remarry, her presence in the home may be unwelcome, and she may well tire of being the unlucky member of the family circle. If just then she hears that neighbours think of migrating to a city, she may join them. Besides these women there are the large number of girls who begin work in the mills as half-timers. For all of these city conditions are full of danger. With regard to those who are the *bona fide* wives of men working in the same mill, the danger is not so urgent except in so far as changed conditions tend to lower standards.

But a large number of the women attached to men working in the mills have no legal bond of union with them. Man and woman working in the mill occupy one house, with their children, so long as they agree to remain together. The man may tire of the woman, or the woman of the man, and they separate. It is difficult to find out what becomes of the children. If the man returns permanently to his country home, the women and the children may be left with no knowledge of his whereabouts. Even if his address is known, few women venture to follow into strange territory and amongst unknown people to demand through the local panchayat<sup>1</sup> support for themselves and their families. The road of least resistance for such a woman is to accept the protection of another of the unattached men working around her. It seems difficult to see any way in which the result can be other than the creation of a population with a steadily lowering moral tone.

There are those who urge that every man who goes to work in a mill should bring his wife with him. Two obstacles stand in the way of this in many cases. The standards of certain communities are such that the men

<sup>1</sup> Village council.



not feel disgraced by working in the mills themselves but would yet never dream of taking their wives into such surroundings; and the housing accommodation, even when clean and sanitary, is not suited for family life.

In some areas it is found that there is a higher standard of mutual loyalty amongst those who, having been born in the lines, settle down there without periodic visits to the country. The solution that this suggests would be very acceptable from the point of view of the employers, as a settled industrial population would lessen many of their difficulties, but efforts in that direction would have to overcome the strong instinctive desires of the majority of the workers and to disarm the grave suspicion that in many cases it is only the periodic visit to the mofussil that keeps the workers from steady deterioration in physique. Thus here again the intricacy with which conditions act and react on each other seems baffling.

Many of those most keenly alive to the needs of women workers wish for speedy development along lines that will supply immediate help on a small scale, and will at the same time educate social workers for further advance and collect material for systematic research into conditions. The demand for women inspectors is expressed in many quarters. That for women doctors in mill areas is even more frequently voiced. And there are few who speak on the subject at all who are not convinced of the need for trained nurses and trained midwives.<sup>1</sup> The collation and examination of the records of pioneers in these directions will be one of the channels through which accurate knowledge of the real state of moral conditions in mill areas will come, and with that knowledge it may be hoped that growing insight into the way in which efforts to improve these conditions may best be made will also come.

One very great difficulty lies in the fact that only in a few exceptional cases is it possible for Indian women to live alone or in small groups and yet maintain their respectability. Deep in the thought of Muslim and Hindu communities alike is the tendency to take for

<sup>1</sup> See pp. 173 f.



granted that no woman can withstand temptation, apart from the care of her natural protector. It is interesting to note how much hangs on this supposition in the story of the Ramayana. There Rama, the ideal hero, though he knows that Sita, the perfect wife, had maintained her purity even in the fortress of Ravan, though he had seen her pass through the ordeal of fire, yet, because his subjects, who did not witness that ordeal, murmur against her, banishes her to the forests. In that action is seen an attitude which is at the root of much that retards India's progress to-day. It is suggestive that in the final scene in which Sita appears, she voices an appeal for the right to her soul. When Rama in remorse sends for her from banishment, he desires that she shall pass through the ordeal once more in order that the people may be convinced of her innocence. But Sita appeals to Mother Earth for vindication.<sup>2</sup> Her appeal is granted and she is received back into the furrow from which she came. The evidence of corn myth origin does not detract from the interest of this ancient expression of the need felt by

1 " 'Rama's queen and Janak's daughter, will she stoop her cause to plead,

Witness of her truth and virtue can a loving woman need ?

\* \* \* \* \*

' If unstained in thought and action I have lived from day of birth,  
Spare a daughter's shame and anguish and receive her, Mother  
Earth !

" If in duty and devotion I have laboured undefiled,  
Mother Earth ! who bore this woman, once again receive thy  
child !

" If in truth unto my husband I have proved a faithful wife,  
Mother Earth ! relieve thy Sita from the burden of this life ! "

" Then the earth was rent and parted, and a golden throne arose,  
Held aloft by jewelled nagas \* as the leaves enfold the rose ;

" And the Mother in embraces held her spotless sinless child,  
Saintly Janak's saintly daughter, pure and true and undefiled,

" Gods and men proclaim her virtue ! But fair Sita is no more,  
Lone is Rama's loveless bosom, and his days of bliss are o'er ! "

(*The Ramayana and the Mahabharata*, condensed into English verse  
by Romesh C. Dutt, bk. xii, canto v.)

\* Serpents.



the individual soul for freedom from unrighteous communal demands.

The attitude of Rama and of his subjects is still the prevailing one in India, but there are echoes of Sita's claim sounding through the continent. The desire they voice is not for liberty through death, but for freedom to live. It is true that these echoes are heard chiefly among those who claim educational and political citizenship of the world, but their demands cannot be won for themselves adequately unless they pause to consider what these may mean for their burdened sisters, and seek to secure for them, not less than for themselves, the right to independent character and development.

It has been suggested that the desire for freedom from the burden of debt and from the exactions of overseers has still an element of vagueness in it. This is so, not because custom has taken away the bitterness of these things, but because they are accepted as inevitable. No drastic outward changes can bring permanent emancipation unless these changes are accompanied by a new spirit of self-respect and independence. As long as individuals are swayed by the belief that it is praiseworthy to spend on the special occasions of marriages and festivals not only all savings, but all credit, any mere temporary liberation from debt will bring little advantage. And the same spirit of dependence which makes custom so dominating in the matter of expenditure stands in the way of escape from the thralldom of the overseer.

On all sides, with differing degrees of optimism, the demand arises for education. India is recognizing "that it is impossible to make rapid progress so long as half of the population remains illiterate and inefficient." It is being widely recognized also that the education that must increasingly be given through schools and colleges is only one department of national education, and that one of the most urgent demands is for the education—self-education it must often be—of educators. This cannot be done by system, but only by life and experience. The efforts for social betterment that have already been inaugurated constitute one branch of education for





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educators, and are gateways by which many approach for the first time the serious study of social relationships. It is well to remember this; otherwise the disappointments that attend such efforts, the leakage of energies in seemingly unproductive directions, and the obstacles that have to be overcome, might prove too discouraging.

In a country where there are millions of children to whom no education is as yet open, it is natural that the leaders of one particular branch of industry should resent any suggestion from outside which tends to saddle them with responsibility for the education of the children of their workpeople, or of those, still children, who work for half-time in their employment. Further, in a country in which many thinking people interested in public affairs are urgently demanding free and compulsory elementary education for all, and which has already passed legislation to promote such education in Bengal,<sup>1</sup> in the Presidency of Bombay,<sup>2</sup> and in the Indian State of Baroda, it is natural that employers of labour should be unwilling to go forward rapidly with elaborate private schemes until they know more clearly how such experimental beginnings will stand in relation to national undertakings.<sup>3</sup>

It is no wonder, therefore, that there are many mills that make no attempt to supply education of any kind, or that in other cases where there are small schools within the mill compounds the results are almost nil.

There are outstanding exceptions, both under Indian and under European management, some of which will be referred to in greater detail. Meanwhile it is interesting to glance at some of the less notable attempts. These can be grouped in four classes. There are many small schools conducted with more or less energy that teach the first elements of reading, writing, and arithmetic

\* The Act allows so many exemptions permitting children to be absent if they live a mile from a school, if they are needed for field work, and so on, that it is quite ineffective.

\* The Act has been passed with a proviso that it will only be carried out as funds are forthcoming, so that at the present time it can only be considered as a permissive Act giving the power to municipalities to put its sections into operation as soon as circumstances permit.

<sup>3</sup> See "Factory Children and Education," by A. G. Clow, I.C.S., *Journal of Indian Industries and Labour*, vol. i, part ii, p. 159.



to the children, especially to the sons of sirdars and babus. In some of these schools a certain amount of technical training is introduced, and even where this is not the case as yet, the need for practical education in the working and processes of the trade is frequently expressed. When housed by the employers, small schools are found close only a small number of the workpeople of a mill are to the dwelling-rooms for the children of the occupants. In each of these types of school the standards of work vary greatly, but both are on such a small scale that even where they exist they touch the lives of a fragment merely of the community. Of a third type is the school which is frankly a place in which to keep children till they are old enough, and healthy enough, to be allowed to work in the mill. In a school of this type, where only reading, writing, and arithmetic were taught, and where there was no great effort to reach even so low a standard as ability to read and write a letter, it was clear that the schoolmaster, though receiving the fairly high<sup>1</sup> salary of fifty rupees a month, had no chance to give any real education to his pupils, as the whole object of the school was to mark time till the children would be passed for work by the certifying surgeon. The manager entirely disagreed with the decisions of the latter, and maintained that as the children were belonging to families working in the mill, the certifying surgeon should not treat him "so." The exact significance of "so" was left to the understanding of the hearer, to whom he appealed for sympathy! "Now, what's the matter with this boy? And with this? I've sent him up four times." This type of school bears a very close resemblance to the fourth, which is empty most of the time and is used principally as a place to which to send uncertificated children when an inspector visits the mill.<sup>2</sup>

On the other hand, notable experiments in elementary education have been made in mills in India which may well take their share in influencing public opinion with regard to the best lines to follow in suiting the curriculum

<sup>1</sup> That is, high in comparison with other salaries given in small schools.

<sup>2</sup> See paragraph on "precincts" on p. 232.





of education throughout the country to the actual needs of the children of village and city labourers. Perhaps the greatest necessity of the present moment is that education should cease to be considered as a means to any end less than the development of personality. The extent to which it is considered to be only a thing to have gone through in order to get a post may be judged by the constant effort to lower standards. A picturesque example of this was seen when a whole school went on strike. The demand of the strikers was that each boy who entered the school should be allowed to pass his leaving examination—no failures tolerated!

A quotation<sup>1</sup> from the speech of a Hindu head master in a high school in a city in the United Provinces shows another way in which this acts. "In this place there have sprung up a number of schools from which the sanctity that should be attached to an educational institution is entirely absent, and of which money-making seems to be the primary aim. The gullible parents are ready to pay exorbitant fees, and those also in advance for many months, when they are promised that their boys would be put up three or four classes above the one for which they were really fit."

In face of this tendency it is interesting to see how far certain mills have gone in working out educational programmes which lead to no immediate advance in position, though an idea of the indifference against which such work has to be carried on may be gathered by the fact that scholars are paid in some cases eight annas and in others one rupee a month for regular attendance in Bombay, and that two rupees a month are given in one school in Ahmedabad. Another mill, in the latter place, adopted the drastic method of insisting on "no school, no work" for its half-timers, without giving any money inducement. It manages to secure all it needs partly perhaps because of its situation, but doubtless also because of the specially good general conditions that prevail.

<sup>1</sup> *A History of the Indian Nationalist Movement*, by Sir Verney Lovett, K.C.S.I., p. 56.



The difficulty of securing steady attendance without prizes or money payments is widespread, and the determination with which mill schools are carried on shows that many employers are realizing the difference in efficiency that comes with even a very small degree of education.<sup>1</sup> Some amongst them have developed practical training on its technical side. Hand-loom weaving, iron-smithing and carpentry classes are held, while others have introduced the teaching of Indian instrumental music, Indian singing and dancing, model building works and wrestling, and in one the boys have regular weekly lessons from a dhobi.<sup>2</sup>

One of the best known mill schools is chosen for description by Dr. Fleming, in *Schools with a Message in India*.<sup>3</sup> It is for the children of workers in the Buckingham and Carnatic mills in Madras, and for half-timer boys. One noticeable feature in it is the very marked change in the bearing of the older boys as compared to the younger ones. It seemed almost possible to see the visible effects of education in the outer garments. In the junior classes, to which the children of the workers come, there are both boys and girls; but in the older classes there are boys only. No women work in these mills except as coolies, and there are no half-time girls.

Certain mills carry their educational work on after school age. Many have libraries, and some have institutes or reading-rooms for their Indian officials, but no women frequent these, though in at least one case the clerks sometimes take books out for their wives to read.

Educative entertainments for women workers and for the wives of employes are held with growing frequency. The bazar in the lines or a large shed in a mill is cleared out and the whole floor space is available on certain nights for the women who squat on the ground and watch the changing pictures of the cinema. A sheet may be

<sup>1</sup> See *Report of the Working of the Indian Factories Act in the Central Provinces and Berar for 1920*, by E. R. Powell, p. 6.

<sup>2</sup> Washerman. Women wash their own saris, but professional washing is done by men in many districts.

<sup>3</sup> See also *The Education of Factory Children in India*, Pamphlet No. 2, Bureau of Education, pp. 1 f.



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provided, but it is not necessary if there is a blank wall near at hand! And if the wall can be seen from neighbouring buildings, so much the better, as every roof and balcony will have its decoration of figures all centred on the gleaming open screen. To know how charming moving pictures may be, it is worth while to watch them in the open air on a cool Indian night when the surrounding roofs become galleries of the picture-house and the soft, rich scent of jasmine floats on the air.<sup>1</sup> A considerable amount of teaching is done through night schools, and here again efforts are being made to provide special training for women, who, however, are slow to take advantage even of classes for sewing and knitting. A successful class is held in the midday recess in one of the Sholapur mills. About fifty attend it and learn reading, writing, and arithmetic, sewing and tailoring.

Two large groups of mills in Bombay that are prominent in their educational work, the Currimbhoy Ebrahim mills and the Tata mills, entrust their welfare work to the Social Service League, organized by members of the Servants of India Society. In these mills religious and moral education, by means of lectures, literature, and addresses is emphasized.

Social education includes not only mill schools, night schools, libraries, and similar activities, but also the inquiries into conditions of life throughout India, and more especially those made in industrial areas, that are being carried on under the direction of the Central Government through the Department of Industries, and by various Local Governments,<sup>2</sup> and the many private investigations that are undertaken by Indians and by Europeans.

Besides direct educational work, the chief activities operative towards the raising of standards in industrial areas are legislation, by which those who see injustice and conditions that make for deterioration seek to bring the power of the whole community into play through

<sup>1</sup> Unfortunately many of the films shown in the cinema houses of the cities depict vulgar and rough parodies of western life.

<sup>2</sup> In the Presidency of Bombay several investigators, one of whom is a lady, have been appointed by the Labour Office.



State ; Welfare Work <sup>1</sup> of many kinds, under which may be included all voluntary effort, either on the part of employers or of members of the public, to secure better conditions for the labourers ; Trade Unions, by which the workers themselves seek to defend their rights and to secure privileges ; and Co-operative Societies, in which members of the labouring community seek to secure their social independence through joint responsibility and mutual trust.

In actual fact the lines are not quite so clearly drawn. Co-operative Societies, for the most part, are inaugurated by the voluntary effort of non-industrials, and are partly dependent for financial support in their earlier stages on Government or on employers. Permanent Trade Unions amongst industrial labourers are organized by outsiders, and are probably in some cases financed from sources other than the wages of the workers. But these headings give a general view of the various lines along which efforts are being made.

<sup>1</sup> See "Welfare Work in Bombay Cotton Mills," by N. M. Joshi, B.A., M.L.A., *Journal of Indian Industries and Labour*, vol. i, part i, p. 17.





## CHAPTER XV

### LEGISLATION<sup>\*</sup>

PERHAPS no historical question is fraught with more perplexity than the question of the relation between the intellectual advance of the race and its social conscience. Reference<sup>2</sup> has already been made to the perplexing fact that conquests by the human mind, so great as those involved in the discovery and adaptation of machinery, have been allowed to work much direct and indirect suffering for large numbers of the race. The result of these steps in the progress of man's victory over nature should have been the lightening of labour and the enriching of the world's storehouses at a smaller cost to the workers. Instead, these great achievements, which must yet be made to serve all groups of the human race, have been made the opportunity for exploitation. The gradual and partial awakening of public opinion to this is only beginning to effect an improvement. One of the reasons why civilization has missed its way, not alone in this case, but at other points of advance also, is that life tends to become departmental. As the sense of corporate responsibility quickens, its results are seen in persistent efforts to introduce standards of conduct that are already acknowledged in certain relationships of life, into regions as yet unaffected by them.

Social legislation is one of the lines along which such efforts find expression. Its inception can often be traced

<sup>\*</sup> References to regulations not mentioned in this chapter will be found under the subjects with which they deal. The influence in India of the Draft Convention arrived at by Washington Conference 1919, with regard to the conditions of women before and after childbirth is treated in chap. xiii.

<sup>\*</sup> See p. 58.



back to the impression made on one person, or on a small group of people, by glaring local evils, but as its history develops in any country, it gains its strength and stability from the individual efforts of employers who go far beyond the limited demands of the legislation of the land in their efforts to secure good conditions for their workpeople. The attempt to make the results of individual initiative available over a wider area gradually arouses public opinion and bands together, in steady co-operation, those who are determined to secure, not only elimination of the worst injustices, but also continued advance towards reasonable conditions.

When a proposed reform comes into the region of legislation, certain things are gained and certain things are lost. Power to influence a large area is gained, and unity of effort. On the other hand, the particular spontaneity and adaptability of private efforts are lost. Legislation must of necessity generalize, and because it does so, and thus gains power to affect large and varied communities, it will almost inevitably tell unfairly in individual cases. There is usually a certain amount of power left in the hands of Local Governments, and of inspectors, to obviate, as far as possible, any injustices that may arise. After making all allowances for the disadvantages that attend its operation, it seems clear that well-considered legislation on social matters tends to secure for an entire industry the conditions worked out by the best employers in it, and that it also enables employers to improve conditions without thereby suffering from unfair competition in particular details on the part of the less scrupulous. And it should never be forgotten that legislation, dull as the subject seems before one enters on its study, is a real method of education to the worker, to the employer, and to the general public. It is with these considerations in mind that the attempt must be made to grasp the significance of factory legislation in India.

The first time that public attention was drawn to the subject in India seems to have been in 1873, when, in a report on the administration of the Bombay





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Cotton Department for 1872-3, the writer, Major Moore, dealt with factory conditions in Bombay, and touched especially on the length of the working hours, the conditions of labour of women and children, and the age at which children were employed. Another who co-operated with Major Moore in bringing this subject under discussion was Mr. J. A. Ballard, the Mint Master of Bombay, who, in speaking of the hardships suffered by women and by children under twelve employed in factories, wrote: "They have to work from daylight to dark, and the machinery is kept running the whole seven days for two weeks in the month. The temperature of the rooms is always high, and the long confinement, even with light work, must be very irksome and injurious to young children. The number of spinning mills in Bombay is yearly increasing, and the sooner the question of affording protection to operatives is considered, the more easy will be legislation."<sup>1</sup> It appears that at that time the children began work at six years of age, and worked from sunrise to sunset, with a brief interval of half an hour, and frequently were allowed only two holidays in the month.

The Secretary of State, whose attention had been called to the conditions of labour in India, and who had seen Major Moore's report, wrote on the subject to the Bombay Government, and in 1875 that Government appointed a Commission to determine whether legislation was necessary. On this Commission there were five Englishmen and four Indians; two of the former, however, were unable to act. The decision arrived at by the majority of the remaining seven was against legislation. All the Indian members and one Englishman (the Director of a Spinning and Weaving Company) objected to any kind of interference with industry. The two remaining members, the Collector of Bombay and an English Doctor, held that a simple legislative enactment would be beneficial, both to the factory owners and to the operatives, but strongly urged that such an Act ought to be passed

<sup>1</sup> "Indian Factory Law Administration," by A. G. Clow, I.C.S., Controller, Labour Bureau, Government of India, *Bulletins of Indian Industries and Labour*, No. 8, p. 2.



the Government of India and not for the Bombay Presidency alone.<sup>1</sup>

During this period the mind of Britain was greatly exercised about reforms in legislation. It was natural that those interested in British conditions should make inquiries about Indian ones, and that a strong desire should be expressed that mills in India should not be allowed to go on unwatched,<sup>2</sup> and repeat the disasters that had taken place in Britain. Miss Carpenter, of Bristol, founder of the National Indian Association, had, during a visit to India, made inquiries into conditions in the factories there. In the circumstances it was probably inevitable that a powerful portion of the British mill-owning community should seize the opportunity thus given to them of diverting criticism from conditions at home by drawing attention to those in India, and should urge that no further burdens be laid upon them to make it still more difficult to compete with cheap labour abroad. The Secretary of State had written of pressure brought to bear on him, but had not mentioned from what quarter or quarters it had come. There was a very general feeling that "the voice was the voice of Exeter Hall, but the hand was the hand of Manchester." Whatever the preponderating influence in Britain might have been, it was resented and criticized as being wielded by "ignorant English philanthropists and grasping English manufacturers." The result was that special irritation was roused in India, and suspicion was directed towards every suggestion that might imply interference. This suspicion is still strong.

But attention had been drawn to facts which could not be ignored much longer. In 1877 there was framed the first draft of a Bill which, after much discussion and alteration, was passed for all India in 1881. Owing to the wearing

<sup>1</sup> In the same year the Government of India communicated with the Government of Bengal, enclosing a copy of the Secretary of State's letter. The reply to this communication suggested "that whatever abuses might exist in Bombay, they were quite sure that the conditions of factories in Bengal were all that could be desired."—*Bulletins of Indian Industries and Labour*, No. 8, p. 2.

<sup>2</sup> *A History of Factory Legislation in India*, by Professor J. C. Kydd, Selly Oak Colleges, pp. 68, 111, 226.



criticism to which it had been subjected, it finally saw the light in what was, from the point of view of its supporters, a very inadequate form. By it children were allowed to work for nine hours a day from the age of eight upwards; clauses that related to the work of women and to holidays were cut out; and the District Officers in the various Provinces were expected to enforce the regulations of the Act without addition to their staffs.

Between 1881, when the first Factory Act was passed, and 1911, when the Act that has been in operation until 1922 was passed, there were continuous discussions roused by Reports,<sup>1</sup> by Commissions and by an amending enactment in 1891.<sup>2</sup> This Act secured one weekly holiday<sup>3</sup> for all workers in factories, a maximum of eleven hours' work a day for women, with one and a half hours' rest during that time. It also prohibited the work of women and children at night,<sup>4</sup> raised the age of children permitted to work in mills from eight to nine years of age, and allowed them to work for seven hours only.

Pressure from Lancashire, which in many cases did harm to reform, continued, and was easily made an excuse for opposing legislation. An interesting quotation from Dr. T. M. Nair sums up the situation. He draws attention to the "attempts to draw the Lancashire red herring across the track of the Factory Commission," and adds: "The many abuses which . . . exist in connection with factory labour in India are certainly not of Lancashire's creation. I am not prepared to maintain that because certain representatives of the cotton industry in Lancashire have prominently drawn the attention of the authorities to the existence of grave abuses in the working of the textile factories, those abuses ought to be condoned. Abuses are abuses, whether they are pointed out by friends or foes."<sup>5</sup>

<sup>1</sup> *Bulletin* No. 8, pp. 8 f.

<sup>2</sup> A separate amendment had been made, for Bombay only, in 1888.

<sup>3</sup> Efforts made to evade the corresponding Section in the Act of 1911 are noted in the *Report of the Working of the Indian Factories Act in the Central Provinces and Berar for the Year 1920*, by E. R. Powell, p. 4.

<sup>4</sup> See pp. 68, 111, 226.

<sup>5</sup> Factory Labour Commission, *Minute of Dissent*, 1908, quoted in *Bulletin* No. 8, p. 131



Meanwhile other influences were reaching India. There had been an international conference at Berlin in 1890,<sup>1</sup> called by the Emperor of Germany through the Swiss Government. In 1900 an "Association for Labour Legislation" was formed and met for the first time in Paris. The members of this Association continued to agitate till, at an official International Conference, called by the Swiss Government in Berne in 1905, the first International Conventions were formulated. These were signed at the same place a year later. They dealt with two special questions, the use of white phosphorus in the making of matches, and the employment of women at night.

In the year before the Act of 1911 became law a memorial was sent to the Secretary of State from the Scottish Trades Unions Congress Parliamentary Committee, suggesting various amendments to the Bill. How far this was suspect, along the same lines as the pressure from Lancashire had been, it is impossible to state, but it marked a new era in the relation of the labour of one country to that of another, as the Conference at Berlin in 1890 and the official International Conference at Berne in 1905 had indicated the rise of a new international spirit amongst those whose interest in the conditions of labour was non-personal.

It is not necessary to enter in detail into the various sections of the Act of 1911.<sup>2</sup> When experience of its working, the development of factory employment, the changes consequent on war conditions<sup>3</sup> and, more especially, the Conventions arrived at by the Labour Conference in Washington in 1919, united to make further legislation necessary, this Act was retained as a basis, and the Indian Factories Act at present in operation is that of 1911 as amended up to 1922.<sup>4</sup>

<sup>1</sup> *Bulletin No. 4, International Labour Organization*, p. 2.

<sup>2</sup> The Indian Factories Act (XII of 1911), quoted in full in *A History of Factory Legislation in India*, by Professor J. C. Kydd, appendix iii.

<sup>3</sup> An important development in the attitude of organized labour to the subject of international legislation, was shown by the findings of the Conference at Berne in October 1917 (*Bulletin No. 4*, p. 4).

<sup>4</sup> Legislation similar to the Indian Factories Act of 1911 is in operation in the Indian State of Baroda and in that of Holkar, Indore. In the State of Ujjain a certain amount of legal control over industry is





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By the Act of 1911 it was permissible for men to work twelve hours and for women eleven hours a day. The Act as amended in 1922 in reducing the working week to one of sixty<sup>1</sup> hours, lessens the possible working week of a man by twelve, and that of a woman by six hours, and has the further advantage of not differentiating between men and women, as far as ordinary working time is concerned. The overtime allowed is twelve hours for a man and six hours for a woman.

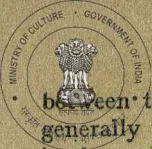
The working hours in cotton mills in Bombay and in Ahmedabad had already been reduced for men and women to about<sup>2</sup> ten hours, except in the case of six mills<sup>3</sup> in the former city, in which there was a double shift of eight hours. In these the time worked by men and women alike will not be altered, nor is it likely that there will be much change in mills where the hours during which women worked were shorter than those of men. Frequently this difference in the length of the working day was not clearly defined. Six and a half hours was the time mentioned in one, in another five or six, and in another eight. The most frequent reason given for the shorter day during which women were employed was that they have more work to do at home, both in the morning and in the evening. It was also urged that it is better for groups of women to come and go by themselves, and that it accords more with their ideas of propriety. In one jute mill it was said that the women got rather smaller wages because the men had less freedom to go out, and were expected to attend to the machines left by the women while the latter were away. It is noticeable that the mills in which there was a considerable difference

exercised and further regulations are under consideration. In the State of Gwalior an employer must obtain permission from Government before he opens a factory, and in order to secure this must undertake to abide by the terms of agreement on which the permission is granted.

<sup>1</sup> Article 10 of the Draft Convention, limiting hours of work, adopted by the International Labour Conference at Washington, begins as follows: "In British India the principle of a sixty-hour week shall be adopted."

<sup>2</sup> See *Wages and Hours of Labour in the Cotton Mill Industry*, Labour Office, Government of Bombay, on p. 18 of which is a table which shows the hours worked in mills in the Presidency of Bombay in 1921.

<sup>3</sup> These mills were outside the Bombay Mill-owners' Association.



between the working day of men and of women seemed generally to be those in which women are employed only in the reeling, winding, and waste-picking departments.

In jute mills each woman worked for two periods, and these when added together did not, as a rule, amount to eleven hours. But there are serious difficulties connected with the shift system, as it is carried out in Bengal. Those coming from a distance must either linger in the mill compound or else walk to their homes in the heat of the day and return again for their second period of work. In some mills an attempt is made to arrange the periods so that those coming from a long distance have both shifts near each other in the middle of the day, while those that live in the immediate vicinity of the mill work in the early morning and late afternoon, securing a restful time in the interval. In highly organized mills elaborate systems of shifts are arranged and tabulated. Some managers expect visitors to be specially interested in these. They show the shift scheme cards with great pride, and are eager to call up women and children in order to show the tokens which are slung round the neck on a loose cord or tied in the corner of a sari. These tokens are no guarantee whatever that the workers are only employed during the shift periods, as they may be quite easily transferred from the neck of one woman to another. Inspectors find it impossible to ascertain how long women are working.\* If sirdar and women co-operate to evade the law, there is nothing simpler than to exchange tokens. In one mill where there was a desire to show the working of the system, the name of the first woman who was called up could not be found in the roll book. No clear explanation was given, and it would have been awkward to insist on information. She was sent back to work, and a second woman was called forward. When her name was looked up it was found that the shift letter on

\* The new Act has done nothing to increase the power of inspectors to check the number of hours during which women are employed. The jute mills work from 5.30 a.m. to 7 p.m., giving a maximum day of thirteen and a half hours, and there seems to be no doubt that many women, especially those who have no husbands to protect them, are at work for more than eleven hours a day.





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her metal token was the same as that which stood opposite her name in the book, but the name was a very simple Indian one which might have belonged to half a dozen different women. When inquiries were made there was great scurrying to get information. One called to another, and that one shouted to a third, a fourth fled for a book, and a fifth opened it, and three or four gathered round to see what was going on, while one worker after another was abruptly summoned to come forward. This is typical of hustling in the east. It is of a different kind from hustling in the west, and much more spasmodic, but the jostling, the shouts, and the general commotion are very obvious.

It is in the less well-organized factories, and in those scattered in outlying districts, that men and women will be most greatly benefited by the limitation of working hours;<sup>1</sup> and nowhere has there been more need for such a limitation than in the ginning factories in which, under the Act of 1911, overtime work was permitted to women. The prohibition of night work for women in industry was demanded by the official International Conference held in Berne in 1905. The Indian Act of 1881 made no reference to the conditions of women's work. The Act of 1891 restricted the work of women at night to factories in which a shift system was in operation. By Section 24<sup>2</sup> of the Act of 1911 the employment of women between seven o'clock in the evening and five o'clock in the morning, or for more than eleven hours in any one day was definitely prohibited. But Section 27 ran as follows: "Nothing in Section 24 . . . shall apply to any woman in any factory for ginning or pressing cotton, in which such number of women are employed as are, in the opinion of the inspector, sufficient to make the hours not more than eleven in any one day."

As already noted,<sup>3</sup> this concession was granted because

<sup>1</sup> See reference to complaints received by the Inspector of Bengal regarding illegal hours of work, in the *Annual Report of the Working of the Indian Factories Act in Bengal, Bihar, and Orissa, and Assam for the year 1920*, by R. P. Adams, O.B.E., A.M.I.Mech.E., p. 12.

<sup>2</sup> Sect. 23 (b) of the Act prohibited the work of children at night.

<sup>3</sup> See p. 111.



of the seasonal nature of the employment, and because of the risk of deterioration of cotton through exposure owing to delay in ginning. The concession has been seriously abused.<sup>1</sup> The prohibition of the employment of women at night is the subject of another of the Draft Conventions adopted at Washington, and the section permitting night work to women in ginning factories has been deleted from the Act as amended in 1922. No loophole is left for the legal employment of women or children at night in any factory. But there is little likelihood that the practice will be abandoned immediately. In outlying places that cannot be reached except by long railway or cross-country journeys employers will count themselves safe in the knowledge that the news of the coming of an inspector will reach them long before he does. With the present staff it has not been found possible to visit all seasonal factories even once a year.<sup>2</sup>

Improvement will be gradual, but the results of the recommendations of the Cotton Committee,<sup>3</sup> of the new Act and of the increased sensitiveness of public opinion may be counted on to make such improvement continuous.

The very meagre demands with regard to the employment of children in factories, made by the Act of 1881 and embodied in the prohibition of employment under seven years of age or for more than nine hours, were increased in 1911.<sup>4</sup> By that Act children were required not only to be nine years of age, but to hold a medical

<sup>1</sup> "Cases have been recorded where ginning factory managers have been convicted for working their women labourers for twenty-four hours."—"Suggestions for Labour Legislation in India," by A. R. Burnett-Hurst, Muir Central College, Allahabad, *Indian Journal of Economics*, vol. iii, part iv, p. 499. See also the Annual Factory Reports for 1920, for the Punjab, the Central Provinces and Berar, and the United Provinces.

<sup>2</sup> "Nineteen prosecutions followed surprise visits of inspection. In seventeen of these cases convictions were obtained, with fines ranging from Rs. 25 to Rs. 150. All these cases had to do with the illegal employment of women and children." "I desire to record that unless heavier penalties are inflicted, the provisions of the Act and rules, especially in the direction of protecting female and child labour, are likely to prove ineffective."—*Report on Working of the Indian Factories Act in the Central Provinces and Berar for 1920*, by E. R. Powell, pp. 3, 6.

<sup>3</sup> *Report of the Indian Cotton Committee*, pp. 186-7.

<sup>4</sup> See *Women in the Factory*, by A. M. Anderson, D.B.E., M.A., pp. 165-77, for British legislation with regard to half-timers. Also *A History of Factory Legislation*, by B. L. Hutchins and A. Harrison, D.Sc., pp. 22, 76, 85.



certificate that they were fit for work. Their employment at night was prohibited, and their hours of work in any one day were not to exceed seven. When the requirements of the Washington Conference became known in India, fierce discussion raged round the question of raising the lower limit at which children might be employed to twelve, in agreement with Article 6<sup>1</sup> of the Draft Convention on the subject. In order to understand the question, it may be worth while to gather a few impressions with regard to the conditions under which these children work. While they are actually employed, the pressure is very great. Every unnecessary minute spent in changing the bobbins on the spinning machines is so much lost time. When the bell rings or the whistle goes, slight, wiry, dark-limbed boys and girls suddenly appear, charge towards the machines, and clear off full bobbins, replacing them with empty ones with amazing dexterity. Generally speaking, when the children are young, the tension seems to be greater, but the spirit in which the work is attacked is bright and keen. In one mill, where a specially large number of small children were at work, there were signs of exhilaration which might easily have suggested that it was only a pleasant game, had it not been realized how often the game recurred, and how domineering the overseers were.<sup>2</sup> There is little doubt that part of this spontaneous energy was due to the fact that there were unaccustomed visitors, and overseer and children co-operated in showing off how speedily the thing could be done. The occupation during the intervals of work varies greatly in different mills. In some the half-timers are found asleep in corners, in others they are out playing in the compounds, while in a few mills they are seen doing odd jobs. Sometimes two or three may be found seated in a great box amongst bobbins, pulling off waste threads and leaving the spools ready for use.

<sup>1</sup> "The provisions of Article 2 shall not apply to India, but in India children under twelve years of age shall not be employed," etc.

<sup>2</sup> This was the only mill in which the author saw overseers carrying sticks. She was assured that they were only for "prestige," and that the workers would rebel at once if they were used to discipline the half-timers. The sticks (to which a cord was attached) were vigorously tapped against cans to summon the children.



even when the lower age limit was nine, children under nine might be found in considerable numbers working on the machines. Two occasions on which attention was called to very small children working in mills may be cited. In the first case it was interesting to notice how long it was before the little girl, once caught sight of, could again be identified. The moment that the sirdar's attention was drawn to the long line of half-timers on the machine, an almost spontaneous movement, by which the little worker was hidden behind nearer workers, took place. The overseer motioned out one after another with a questioning look, as much as to say, "Do you consider this one too small?" and it was only after very considerable persistence that the little figure was tracked down among the older ones behind whom she had hidden. When at last she was identified the sirdar was, or pretended to be, exceedingly angry, and seized a huge bobbin, which he brandished, while she vanished like a dark flash of lightning round the corner of the machines and away out of sight. Probably she had come from some group of children who were playing in another part of the mill near their parents. In the other case, in which a child was pointed out, the manager questioned the woman at the machine next to her, and then said with indifference: "Oh, yes, she has come with her mother's dinner; if an inspector saw her he would fine her," but he passed on, leaving her at work.

The law was broken to a far greater extent by the employment of half-timers in two mills or even in three on the same day. In places where the engines work for sixteen hours or more in twenty-four, such children might be employed for fourteen or fifteen hours a day. In a much larger number of cases they were employed for twelve hours.

In Calcutta, the shift system added to the difficulty of inspectors in checking the hours during which a child had worked in one mill. Neither there nor elsewhere was it possible for them to prevent the employment of children in different mills on the same day. Each child was required to secure a certificate of age and medical fitness to work



in the mills, but the number of certifying doctors provided in the large centres was entirely inadequate. No one could possibly remember the faces and general appearance of the thousands of children that came for certification, and it was possible for the same surgeon to give three different certificates to the same boy or girl under different names within a couple of months. In Bengal, the proportion of children working in, at least, two mills was said to be sixty-five per cent. of the total number of half-timers. There seemed to be little attempt to conceal this. A mother would quite casually excuse herself to a visitor by saying that she had to get her little girl, just home from one mill, off to another for the afternoon. Though the shift system of Calcutta made it more difficult to check this practice, it was not responsible for it. In Ahmedabad, where no shift system existed, an even larger proportion of children worked in two mills in one day. One reason given for this was that the arrangements for the certification of children for work in the mills was not on a satisfactory footing, but probably a still more vital cause of it was that public opinion is absolutely callous on the point.

It was interesting to find the differences of opinion within the same town with regard to the work of half-timers in two mills. In Ahmedabad, generally speaking, it was quite frankly admitted that the thing was common, but even there it was possible to find those who maintained that boys were far too fond of play to do any work they could avoid. Others in the same city admitted that some managers not only winked at the practice, but even allowed the same half-timers to work in different mills run by the same company and within the same compound, and the efforts made by more progressive employers to prevent this, and acknowledged by them to be only partially successful, would have afforded further proof of the fact had such additional proof been needed.

There seems little doubt that the double employment of children is continued under the amended Act.\* It

\* Later information confirms this surmise. No hope is held out that the practice will be stopped without more stringent legislation.



may be feared that it will be carried to an even greater extent under the new regulation which raises the lower limit of age to twelve, because public opinion will be still more ready to ignore flagrant breaches of the law when the children are older. It is probable that in certain cases this may involve children in longer hours of work than adults, as they may manage, by going to two mills, to work for twelve hours in one day.

Under the Act as amended in 1922 the position of the certifying surgeon is strengthened. He now has power to cancel any certificate granted if he considers the child no longer fit for employment in a factory. The qualifications of those who may act for him are more precisely stated. In 1911 the wording was "Any person practising medicine or surgery"; now the certifying surgeon, if he wishes to delegate his authority, may only do so if he secures a registered practitioner to act for him. And the larger limit of the fine, to which the occupier and manager of a mill, in which any woman or child who has already, on the same day, worked in another mill, has been knowingly employed are jointly liable, is raised from two hundred to five hundred rupees. But until the certifying and inspecting staffs have been greatly enlarged, and general opinion has been more deeply stirred, it will remain difficult to prove charges under this section of the Act, and unpopular to exact heavy fines.

It has been so much the custom in India to allow mothers to bring their young children to the mills, that it was considered unwise to attempt to pass legislation<sup>1</sup> forbidding the presence of all under half-time age in mills. It is noticeable, in this connection, that although there is no legal enactment on this matter, a certain number of employers provide crèches, and do not allow women to bring children with them, unless they leave them in the crèche, while some other firms, probably more independent with regard to labour, forbid all workers to bring their children into the mills without providing any

<sup>1</sup> See p. 189. See also on this subject "Suggestions for Labour Legislation," by A. Burnett-Hurst, *Indian Journal of Economics*, vol. iii, part iv, p. 498.





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other accommodation for them. While this is so in a certain proportion of mills, in a large number little children are found playing about, or sleeping on the ground. In the Act of 1911, in order to minimize the danger of children under age being employed, Section 46 ran as follows: "If a child over the age of six years is found inside any room, or part of a factory in which room or part children are employed and in which any manufacturing process or work incidental to any manufacturing process is carried on, he shall, until the contrary is proved, be deemed to be employed in the factory."

The onus of proof that a child between the ages of six and nine, found in any room in which children are employed, was not actually working, lay on the employers and tended to exclude children of these ages from the mills, as the managers did not want the trouble of keeping them out of special departments. Where the law was systematically broken, however, the wording of the clause made it possible to send off all children under nine who were working in the mill into the compound or into the school, if there was one, whenever there was a likelihood that an inspector would appear, and in view of this it was strongly urged that, under the amended Act, the onus of proof that a child under twelve was not working in the mill should lie on the management if the child were found anywhere within the mill precincts. With the added temptation that would come to employ under legal age, owing to the raising of that age to twelve years, it was felt by many of those who were interested in the Bill that, at all costs, children should be kept out of all mill buildings or compounds. On the other hand, legislators who had little experience of mill conditions were entirely unaware of, or blind to this danger, and were swayed by the obvious arguments that were brought up in favour of the restricted wording of the section as it stood in 1911 and still stands. They maintained that it would be an intolerable burden for each management to have to prove that every child who came with food for its parents or to look after its younger brothers and sisters was not employed in the factory. A further complication was brought in by the



that a considerable number of firms that provide education for the children of their workpeople and for their half-time workers had already built school buildings within their mill compounds. It is probable that an unreasonable weight was put on this argument. It would seem a comparatively simple thing, in many cases at any rate, to enclose the school buildings and grounds and to make a separate entrance to these. But there was little realization of the need to protect the age limit, and the clause which would have excluded children from the precincts was lost.

It is interesting to notice that the arguments put forward against industrial legislation in India are curiously similar to those put forward against it at earlier dates in Britain ; and even more interesting to trace in the development of social legislation in both countries how often the arguments used to oppose its beginnings (and each new forward step) are eventually used to extend its scope. " Why single out mills, when unorganized work and work in mines is done under much worse conditions ? " is a typical question of the opposition. It can easily be modified. " If large mills, why not small ones ? " <sup>1</sup> " If mills, why not mines ? " <sup>2</sup> " If mills and mines, why not other industries ? " Again it is asked : " Why should women and children be treated on a different footing from men ? " " Why interfere with the liberty of the workers to make the best use of their time ? " But the study of

<sup>1</sup> For legislative purposes the size of a mill is estimated by the number of workers employed in any one day. The Act of 1911 applied to factories in which fifty workers were so employed, and permitted local authorities to extend its action to those in which twenty were so employed. Under the amended Act the numbers are twenty and ten, respectively. The Act as modified in 1922 removes the distinction between textile factories for which the regulations had been more stringent than for others, omits all exceptions to the earlier Act, other than mines, and gives Local Governments power to notify as a factory any premises in which not less than ten persons are simultaneously employed, whether mechanical or electrical power be used or not.

<sup>2</sup> A Bill to amend the Mines Act of 1901 is at present under discussion, (see p. 271). This Act of 1901 was almost entirely permissive, and on the points which relate to women and children, it has remained a dead letter. Sect. 15, para. 2, runs : " If for reasons to be recorded in the order the Chief Inspector, or the Inspector of Mines, is of opinion that there is urgent and immediate danger to the life or safety of women or children employed in or at any mine, he may, by order in writing, prohibit the employment of such women and children."



the conditions of women and children brought knowledge of the workers as a whole, and those who drafted the amendments of 1922 asked on one point after another: "If women and children, why not men?"<sup>1</sup>

The poverty of the workers and their need to earn every pittance they could was made a plea for non-interference. To-day all India is asking why there is such poverty, and what can be done to liberate the land from the burden of it. "The fear of checking a new industry" loomed large in the minds of those who, in earlier days, opposed factory legislation, and though that fear still acts as a barrier against over-rapid legislation, the fact that the inefficiency of much of the labour power of India is the greatest check on its industry is widely realized.

In spite of the admission that certain details of present legislation in India are still allowed to be a dead letter, there are urgent demands on the part of reformers for further enactments.<sup>2</sup> The strongest feeling circles round one or two subjects, but many other less important or less immediate ones are brought forward from time to time. A Workmen's Compensation Bill<sup>3</sup> was presented to the Legislative Assembly in September 1922, and was referred to a Joint Select Committee then. It is hoped that it will be ready to come into operation in July 1924. The difficulties that attend the drafting of the Bill are very great, but there seems to be a general agreement, both amongst employers of labour and others interested in labour questions, that such a Bill is necessary, and should be framed without delay.

There is also a very strong demand for the registration and protection of Trade Unions. The causes that lead to delay in the presentation of a Bill, on this subject, which has been discussed for some time now, will be more fully touched on in the chapter on Trade Unions.

<sup>1</sup> In the amended Act of 1922, in sect. 25, which prohibits employment in two mills on the same day, after "any woman or child," the clause is added, "or save in such circumstances as may be prescribed, any other person"; in sect. 26, which enacts the fixing of specified hours of work for each worker in each mill, "person" has been inserted in the place of "woman or child."

<sup>2</sup> See p. 270.

<sup>3</sup> See p. 271.



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The wide discussion of labour conditions has led to demands for welfare legislation. The desire is expressed for parliamentary measures to secure that mills where women are employed shall be compelled to provide accommodation for children, that women inspectors shall be appointed, that women doctors shall be attached to mills, and that the opening of drinking shops in labour centres shall be prohibited. Though it is not probable that many of these latter demands will become subjects of legislation in the immediate future, their discussion helps in the education of public opinion on such matters.





## CHAPTER XVI

### TRADE UNIONS

THE growth of Trade Unions in India is of recent date, and anything in the nature of a fully formulated Association has only been known for a few years. The name is still given to organizations that are merely temporary strike committees which arise in connection with isolated grievances and dwindle away when the workers meet with defeat or when the grievance is remedied.<sup>1</sup> Strikes,<sup>2</sup> however, occur naturally amongst Indian workers who readily combine together and cease work, or absent themselves from the mills on any occasion of strife. The causes that lead to strikes are very varied. The commonest demands are for a rise in wages, or for an increase of bonus. Very often, however, subsidiary demands are linked with the primary one, and may refer to supplies of clean water, dining-sheds and holidays. In other cases the grievance that caused or embittered the dispute has been the amount of size used, or in the case of women, the absence of coolies to carry bobbins from the roving to the spinning rooms. Sometimes a claim is made for an allowance when the machinery is in bad condition, or when the quality of the jute or cotton is so poor as to damage the output. Difficulties arise, and will probably arise to an increasing extent, in connection with overseers. These may take

<sup>1</sup> See reference to a visit to India by Mr. Keir Hardie in 1907, and to his conclusion that his purpose to attempt to start Trade Unions there was premature, in an article on "Industrial Conditions and Trade Unions in India," by Michael Prothero, *Edinburgh Review* for October 1922, p. 364.

<sup>2</sup> "A strike is in western countries the last, while in India it is the first weapon of redress."—"Labour Unrest in India," by Gulzari Lal Nanda, M.A., LL.B., *Journal of Indian Economics*, vol. iii, part iv, p. 464.



the form of demands to get rid of an overbearing sirdar, or to have one who has been dismissed replaced, or of an effort to secure someone who is popular. A disturbance of this kind may be complicated by the fact that some sirdars are apt, when there is trouble in the departments, to send in the names of men whom they dislike for dismissal, and to get nominees of their own put into such men's places. It is interesting to notice in this connection that the western terms used are often misleading. When reference is made to the demand for "the management of discipline by the workers" it may be scorned as an altogether absurd proposal, in view of the general illiteracy. It appears, however, in a somewhat different light when the request spoken of as a "demand for the management of discipline by the workers" turns out to be little more than a protest against the appointment of a new sirdar who happens to be one of an oppressive clique already too powerful in the mill!

When such strikes, entirely independent of any Trade Union, happen, various methods are taken by the management to bring them to an end. A small deputation of workmen may be met in the manager's office. When the difficulty is connected with a sirdar, inquiry into the conditions, and dismissal or reinstatement, if such seems wise, may bring the embryo strike to an end. If these methods fail, the manager may arrange (or happen), to meet the strikers or their leaders in the bazar. Very probably an influential moneylender, or gambler, or wrestler, or all three combined in one person is put forward as their representative. In other cases the priest of the temple or the moulvi<sup>1</sup> of the mosque may be their spokesman. Discussion is carried on in the open in an informal way. If this is not successful, there are cases in which a bribe from the manager, sometimes paid out of his own pocket, will be given to an overseer or to any other who will settle a strike.

Attempts to organize permanent Trade Unions, on the other hand, still meet with very special difficulties. Various considerations that have already been mentioned tend

<sup>1</sup> Muslim priest.





to increase these. The fluctuation of labour makes it extremely difficult to keep regular records of members. As the latter move from one district to another, from one mill to another, or from town to country and back again, they lose touch with any union that they may have joined. For this reason it is difficult to recover payments. The position of the overseers in the mill further complicates the situation, as it would not suit their present outlook to be members of a Trade Union on an equal footing with the other workers, and they hold in their hands so much power that it is almost impossible for the workers to combine against them permanently. The prevalence of debt and the need to find the monthly interest for the moneylender, obviously makes it difficult for people to pay other weekly or monthly dues, and even in those cases where there is a surplus, the tendency to convert money into jewellery and to consider a wife's ornaments a safe bank, further operates against the stability of Trade Unions. Probably the greatest difficulty in the way of regular organization and progress is illiteracy. It was a woman who said, when she was asked why she was not working, that the Raj<sup>1</sup> had forbidden people to work, but many of the men who are working in mills have little more grasp of the situation than she had, and are swayed one way or another by the advice of the last person to whom they have spoken.

One result of this is that in almost every case the beginnings of Trade Union organization have taken place outside of the mills and workshops. A further complication enters here, owing to the fact that so much of the work of these Unions has been purely political. Outsiders who have been the organizers of the present Trade Unions may be divided into four groups: real sympathizers; political agitators; unscrupulous individuals; and those who are to a certain extent real sympathizers with Labour, but whose primary interest is political. The unscrupulous individuals who have often engineered strikes, and temporary Trade Unions, may be dismissed in a few words. They frequently belong to the lawyer class, and may

<sup>1</sup> Government. See p. 111.



either take their opportunity when trouble is known to be in mills, or may directly stir up grievances in the hope of making money out of the disturbance. Those who are moved by the desire for social justice and by sympathy with the workers alone, and those who are political agitators pure and simple, are difficult to distinguish individually from the larger body of those who, to a greater or less extent, combine the two characteristics.

Mr. Hurst<sup>\*</sup> in writing of the earlier Trade Unions, deplores that "social workers did not take the initiative," but "allowed the lawyer-politician class to capture and control these bodies." He goes on to note the absence of printed and published rules, and the fact that the organization and control of many Unions relating to different trades is in the hands of the same group of persons, who desire to control Labour for political ends. The question of motive on the part of the organizers will come up again in connection with the more prominent Trade Unions which are now in operation. Meanwhile, it is interesting to note an extreme instance of the way in which purely political propaganda may be carried out. The case in question is one in which it would be impossible to feel that the general interests of the poorer workers of the industry were the special motive. It occurred in a mill in South India. The instigators persuaded a small, essential group of workers (roller-coverers) to strike. In this particular mill there were four men only in the group. No other workers understood how to cover rollers. The absence of the four men threatened the paralysis of the work of the entire mill. A stoppage was prevented because there happened to be in the mill a skilful workmen who quickly learnt from the manager how to cover the rollers. For fear lest he might be molested he was not allowed to work on the mill premises. The rollers were carried to a shed close to the manager's house, and through the emergency this one man was able to keep the mill supplied. Further efforts by the propagandists were made to get hold of the engineers of the mill, but in this they failed. In

\* "Suggestions for Labour Legislation," by A. R. Burnett-Hurst, B.Sc., F.S.S., *Indian Journal of Economics*, vol. iii, part iv, p. 504.





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circumstances where methods such as these are used to inaugurate strikes it is natural that many employers would welcome the organization of Trade Unions, and would be grateful to have a united body of workers with which to bargain. While this is true of some, there is no doubt that other employers would resent further developments. One reason for this is the prevalent belief that willingness to meet organized Labour would be mistaken for weakness by the workers, and would embolden the leaders to encourage strikes, and thus keep workers restless. The attitude of a considerable number of employers is exemplified by a manager who said that the Unions in Ahmedabad had caused him to lose all control over the men, and added that if he told a man to go back to his work, when many were loitering about in the open smoking at 9.45 a.m., there would be a strike.

Trade Unions amongst clerks, railway workers, and seamen have been in operation for some considerable time. The Employees' Association in Calcutta has a membership of accountants, stenographers, and insurance canvassers, but in 1921 it included no manual workers amongst its members. Beginnings of interest were shown by the fact that many labourers and overseers came to ask advice from the office, and the fact that dock labourers and iron workers were represented at a Trade Union Congress held in Calcutta, in April 1922, suggests that the movement must be gaining ground. There is also a Bengal Labour Federation, which takes part in efforts to bring about better understanding between Employers and Labour, but there seem to be no organized Trade Unions amongst mill-workers on the Hooghly. One of the first Trade Unions amongst the actual workers in mills was formed in Madras,<sup>1</sup> in 1918, but after a stormy career, had not, in 1922, achieved stability.

Within the last two or three years there have been developments which differ from any of those already

<sup>1</sup> It was organized by Mr. B. P. Wadia, author of *Labour in Madras*. See "Industrial Conditions and Trade Unions in India," by Michael Prothero, *Edinburgh Review*, October 1922, p. 375; *Indian Journal of Economics*, vol. iii, part iv, p. 513, and the *Round Table*, March 1921, p. 373.



mentioned. The headquarters of these are in Ahmedabad and in Bombay. In the latter case the movement is suspected of political motives, and is quite obviously coloured by political ideals. These add to the enthusiasm with which the work of organization is carried on, but detract from its stability from the social point of view. As has been suggested, it is extremely difficult to disentangle politics from social conscience all through the work of Trade Union organization and strike propaganda in India. It is, perhaps, well to suggest here that an attitude is imaginable in which the two might be identified ; and that political ideals might be growingly based on the desire to secure just and fair conditions for all workers. There is a considerable body of opinion which is fully convinced that this is, to a very great extent, the case in India, and there are lines of national thought that give strength to this opinion. At the same time Indian reformers, as well as outsiders who are interested in social questions, realize that there is a great danger of using Labour as a tool with which to secure political power for small companies of leaders who will not necessarily be permanently sympathetic with the workers. The attitude of many educated Indians towards the illiterate is not of a kind to inspire complete confidence.

Before going on to consider the two main lines along which the development of Trade Unions is at present proceeding, it is worth while to notice that there is already a development of Tenants' Unions in several parts of India. In these the members combine to bargain with the legal land-owners, and so to secure better conditions of land tenure and more reasonable conditions with regard to labour. Their influence has created a spirit of independence amongst workers which has resulted, in certain localities, in the modification or sweeping away of serfdom.<sup>1</sup>

Reference has been made to the work of Trade Unions in the town of Ahmedabad. The organizing headquarters there occupy a large office in a house in the centre of the

<sup>1</sup> See *India in 1921*, A Report prepared for presentation to Parliament, by Professor Rushbrook Williams, p. 199.





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city. Above this office lives Ansuyabai Sarabhai, an Indian lady, who has devoted her life to the organization of Trade Unionism. She is a convinced non-co-operator, and an intimate friend of Gandhi. At his trial he referred any who wished guidance with regard to industrial matters in Ahmedabad during his imprisonment to her. She is chairman of not less than eight Trade Unions, and works in co-operation with a group of voluntary organizers who have endeavoured, with perseverance, to train the members whom they enrol in methods of self-government and independence. Ansuyabai Sarabhai herself is in close touch with the conditions in which labourers live and work, and has great influence, not only amongst the members of the Trade Unions, but also with employers. In these Unions the workers are organized according to the particular branch of work in which they are employed. In the autumn of 1921 there were from fifteen to twenty thousand members, of whom about two thousand were women. All the preliminary organization there had been done for the workers, but in 1921 it was already possible to say that the committees that had been established were able to run their business with little help from outside. The contribution is one rupee a month for each man or woman, and two annas for each half-timer. The organizers, and the committees that they have trained, find great difficulty in persuading the workers of the need of ventilation, humidity, and sanitation, but they are working steadily in the hope of educating large numbers to appreciate a higher standard of life in these and in other directions.

At the end of 1921 a demand had been made for the equivalent of two months' payment, as annual bonus, and after a general strike, a compromise had been arranged but various small strikes continued to break out on minor points. During this period there seemed to be little bitter feeling, even in the mills in which workers were still on strike. It is interesting to note that trade was so prosperous at the time that in the opinion of at least one manager it would have been quite easy for the employers to agree to two months' pay and the payment of full wages for the days the



men were on strike. He considered that it would be well worth while to do this and so to keep the people happy and eager to work in the mills, and added the suggestion that the workers like to come to a mill that is succeeding.

In the course of another conversation in which employers were taking part, the enormous sum spent on granting this further bonus to the workers of Ahmedabad was mentioned ; but when a question was asked with regard to the amount of profit made by the cotton mills in Ahmedabad and a very high figure was suggested, a laugh broke out in the room, and the remark was made : " That figure has got about." No more was said about the cost of increasing the bonus of the workers in Ahmedabad !

An interesting instance of the way in which these Trade Union committees are endeavouring to foster the sense of obligation to stand by the decision of the Union occurred at the time of visits from Shaukat Ali and from Mahommed Ali. The brothers were expected to arrive in Ahmedabad within a few days of each other, and there was a strong feeling amongst the mill workers that holidays should be demanded. The Trade Union committees turned this suggestion down firmly. In spite of this, the workers left the mills and joined the demonstration in welcome of the political leaders. The organizers of the Trade Unions were successful in persuading those who had struck to work overtime till they had made up the loss in output to the mills in which they were employed, and were also able to secure the employers' co-operation so that the overtime was accepted by them.

The All-India Trade Union Association was founded at a Congress held on October 31, 1920. There had previously been much unrest in Bombay, and many serious strikes, and no doubt the minds of those who were in touch with Labour questions were open to the idea of initiating a permanent national body of Trade Unions. But it is interesting to note that the reason for the calling of this Congress on which stress was laid was the fact that the Government of India had appointed Mr. N. M. Joshi as the representative of Labour to the Washington





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Conference in 1919 without consulting Labour.<sup>\*</sup> Though Government officials were strongly censured for having done this, it was difficult to maintain a case for criticism when there was no representative body of Labour in India. Eight hundred delegates from different parts of India were present at the Congress that met in 1920. Sixty Unions were affiliated, and forty-two others expressed their sympathy with the Conference and gave their support to it. It is noticeable that the Unions of Ahmedabad are entirely absent from the list. The leading names at this Congress are those of Lala Lajput Rai, Joseph Baptista and Chaman Lal. To those who have followed recent events in India the conjunction of these three names at once suggests the thought that an organization so led could not fail to have a strong political bias. It suggests also that, except for sympathy and keen interest, there could be no real first-hand knowledge of labour conditions on the part of any of the leaders. In the official report of the Congress only one working man is represented as taking part.

The Congress appointed itself a permanent body to meet once a year. It drew up a Constitution, elected an executive to carry on the work, and arranged for Provincial Councils which, under the Executive, should be responsible for co-ordinating the work in the respective provinces. These Provincial Councils were to be composed of representatives from all *bona-fide* unions in each Province. The last phrase opens up the question of what the Indian National Trade Unions Congress implies by the words "*bona-fide* Trade Union." The aim of the Association is to gather into one great central Trade Union Movement all grades of workers. In its desire to be inclusive, it invites labourers from poorly paid departments to join the local Unions and share in the benefits before they pay any subscription, and takes for granted that they will so appreciate the advantages that they receive that they will soon voluntarily subscribe. The secretary who spoke of this seemed to think that it would be possible to expel

<sup>\*</sup> See "Industrial Conditions and Trade Unions in India," by Michael Prothero, *Edinburgh Review*, October 1922, p. 369.



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such members at a later date if they did not agree to subscribe when they were asked to do so. Interesting questions arise in this connection. How is it possible for a Union to offer such terms? Are there sums of money at its disposal from propagandists who wish to secure a solid body of Labour, united in one great association throughout India, as a political weapon? <sup>1</sup> The great emphasis laid on the fact that Indian labourers need discipline and must learn to obey, when these points were insisted on by an extreme Nationalist, made it seem that, to him at least, the Trade Union Movement was the preparation of a possible army of revolutionaries. The stress laid upon the need to train workers to manage Trade Union affairs themselves, which was evident in Ahmedabad, was not noticeable in discussing the central organization. Reference was made to Ahmedabad, but there seemed to be little appreciation of its qualities, and an apparent desire to draw its Unions into line with the National Association when an opportunity to do so should arrive. The All-India labour association at its later congresses has drawn out a list of subjects on which it desires legislation. In the forefront is the demand for an Act safeguarding Unions. In connection with this it is interesting to notice that while the differences between the history of Labour in India and in Britain are emphasized in order to demand for Trade Unions in India less supervision and freedom from the need to register, the differences in the conditions of Labour with regard to standards of living and of literacy, which would obviously call for some kind of safeguard for the workers, are entirely ignored. The All-India Trade Union organization separated women's Trade Unions from men's, and apparently retained in the hands of its leaders the control of the women's association that was in operation in the early months of 1922. "No men are members of the Union—we only organize it for them and rent the room." <sup>2</sup> As yet, except in Ahmedabad,

<sup>1</sup> The All-India Trade Union Congress, assembled on March 24, 1923, at Lahore, passed a resolution on the necessity of raising a fund for the support of Indian Labour.

<sup>2</sup> This women's Union has not yet (May 1923) entered on an active career.



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few women are affected by Trade Unions. They have, however, great power of co-operative action along lines that already appeal to them, and can combine effectively. This can be gathered from the frequency with which it is said that the women must be humoured if their husbands are to be retained as workers in the mills. An interesting example of their capacity for joint action is seen in a mill in Bombay where there is, on the wall of one of the rooms in which they work, a clock that was bought for forty rupees by the women in the room and was brought by them to the mill. When it arrived they asked if they might have it put up on the wall; the management agreed, said that they would be most happy to give the clock to the workers, and offered to pay the forty rupees that had been collected for it. The workers refused the offer. They wished the clock to be their own, and no doubt they also wished to keep the management of it. Whether they feared that the time would be tampered with if they accepted it as a gift, it is impossible to say, but the incident shows the capacity for united action amongst them.

In the early summer of 1922, a large number of women workers in a jute mill in Bengal, having heard that higher wages were paid in a neighbouring mill, struck work for an increase of two annas in the rupee. Their absence brought the work of the mill to a standstill. At the end of a fortnight the employers agreed to the demand of the strikers. This is probably the first strike in Bengal which has been conducted and carried through to success by women.



## CHAPTER XVII

## CO-OPERATION

THE place that may be filled by the development of co-operation in India is so great that the subject, though alluded to in other connections, must be treated by itself.

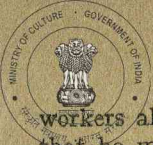
Much of the debt that burdens the populations of the Provinces has been incurred for unproductive purposes. The marriage festivities to which reference has been made are often the principal occasions of a family's debt; but there are many other causes. If a hut is burnt down, there may be no surplus from the income to rebuild it, and a loan is sought for that. Other unproductive loans are obtained for food in times of scarcity, for litigation, or as advances of wages in time of illness. But often the cultivator must borrow for productive purposes, for the purchase of bullocks to replace old or sick ones, for seed, for tools. Having secured his loan in either case, he goes off with little thought of the burden that he has brought upon himself. The interest charged is very heavy, an ordinary rate being an anna in the rupee per month, that is a shilling in the year for a loan of one shilling and fourpence. Of course, it is obvious that a man who borrows a rupee at this rate of interest, and has no prospect of improving his condition, will often be unable to pay the monthly anna, with the result that the unpaid interest accumulates. For larger sums the interest is seldom less than thirty-six per cent.; it is often forty-eight per cent., and quite often seventy-five per cent.; it is said that it sometimes rises to two hundred per cent. Once or twice a year the unpaid interest is added to the original amount, and a new bond is drawn out. As the moneylender generally has a smattering of education, and



his borrower in many cases is entirely illiterate, the latter is frequently defrauded. He has neither knowledge of the real meaning of the bond, nor has he power to check the illegitimate additions to his debt. The security on which money is lent may be the family jewels, or the land of the cultivator if he owns land, or the actual crops in the field. Many cultivators deal with two or three moneylenders at a time. A holding under one landlord may be mortgaged to one moneylender, and another holding to another, while a third creditor has his wife's jewellery as security, and a fourth is counting on his crops. Where a cultivator has to apply to the moneylender for seed or for money to keep him in food during the last weeks before harvest, repayment and interest are taken in produce at the time of harvest. The moneylender is seedlender and grain dealer, and in some areas he is also landlord. The amount of grain recovered varies from one and a half times to five times the original loan, and in order that nothing may escape him, the moneylender sends a man to secure his share when the crop is cut.

When it is remembered that the cultivating tenant often pays his rent and his other local debts, not in money which he has received for the produce of his fields, but in the actual produce itself, it is easily understood that this system of moneylending and seedlending brings him into such a position that he is virtually a serf who receives only enough to keep himself and his family in life and to sow his fields, and has still, while only receiving that, a hopeless burden of debt weighing upon him. It is little wonder that at one stage or another of this process workers migrate to the centres of industry.

The moneylender is a great oppressor, but it must be remembered that he is a necessity in the village districts amongst the cultivators until some better system takes his place. Whether as landlord he is looking for future rents, or as seed merchant he is looking for the payment of the debt already due to him, he will see to it that on some terms or other the cultivator is provided with seed for sowing in his field. It is to his interest to keep the



workers alive, and this fact puts a limit to the pressure that he may bring to bear upon them. He will get no return unless he provides them with grain to eat until harvest time. In times of scarcity he may be helpful in tiding a community through difficulties, if the sums needed do not exhaust his reserves. Government famine relief schemes are sometimes arranged so that if the money-lenders are willing to agree to the prescribed prices, the grain supplied by relief grants is distributed to the people through them.

As early as 1882 it was clearly seen that in order to improve the lot of the agriculturalist, opportunities of securing credit at a reasonable rate of interest must be provided, and that such opportunities must be introduced by methods through which individual borrowers would growingly realize their responsibility, not only for the interest, but also for the repayment of the capital as they were able to refund it, if the communities served by them were to thrive. Sir William Wedderburn, then District Judge of Poona, drew the attention of Government to the magnitude of the problem raised by agricultural indebtedness. The scheme then proposed was abandoned, but efforts to find practical methods of meeting the need continued.<sup>1</sup> Study of Mutual Loan Funds initiated in the Presidency of Madras strengthened the belief that there was a natural aptitude for co-operation in the Indian peoples. In 1901 two hundred Co-operative Credit Societies were established by Sir Anthony Macdonnell in the United Provinces. A Co-operative Credit Societies Act was passed in 1904. The rapid development of rural and urban Credit Societies led to the demand for legislation that would provide for the registration of Co-operative Societies for distribution<sup>2</sup> and production. The Co-operative Societies Act of 1912 supplied this need.

<sup>1</sup> See *Report on Land and Agricultural Banks*, by Sir Frederick Nicholson; *People's Banks for North India*, by Dupernex, and *The Co-operative Credit Movement in India*, by Panchanandas Mukhopadhyaya, M.A., F.R.G.S.(Lond.).

<sup>2</sup> See "Co-operative Distribution in Northern India," by A. C. Chatterjee, B.A., I.C.S., *Indian Journal of Economics*, vol. i, part ii, p. 145.





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The accumulated debts that exist both in agricultural and in industrial areas; the continued and deep-rooted desire to borrow for unproductive purposes; the difficulty of securing the regular payment of interest and the prompt repayment of loans that fall due, by milder methods than those of the moneylender, and the tendency of the embryo co-operator to attempt to borrow both from his society and from moneylenders, are some of the most obvious difficulties that still meet those who seek to found Co-operative Credit Societies. In spite of all, great progress has been made in country areas.

The rural Credit Societies lend money for the purchase of seed and manure, for the sinking of wells, for the buying of cattle and of food for cattle. Under certain conditions Government may help with initial expenses, but no permanent financial responsibility is borne.<sup>1</sup>

The aim of these Credit Societies is to take their members out of the hands of moneylenders, and to lead them on to entire independence. The rate of interest asked varies from nine per cent. to eighteen per cent; for productive purposes it is often twelve per cent. or less. In many cases profits that remain after working expenses have been deducted, and lawful charges on the society have been met, are credited to a reserve fund which belongs to the society as a whole, and may not be divided amongst the members. The liability is mutual and unlimited, and this, with the fact that all the members of each society live in the same district, helps to secure the pressure of public opinion on anyone who tries to delay payment of interest or repayment of the original loan. It also tends towards careful discrimination in the admission of new members. It is usual not only to consider the character of the candidate for membership, but to examine his state of indebtedness. In certain cases compositions are arranged to which the moneylender is glad to agree in order to receive immediate cash payment.

<sup>1</sup> "Except in the first stage, when the meaning of co-operation is unknown to the public, Government money should be unnecessary."—"Co-operation and the State," by C. F. Strickland, I.C.S., *Indian Journal of Economics*, vol. iii, part i, p. 57.



In many cases the village schoolmaster, who may also be village accountant, is appointed secretary of the local Credit Society. But sometimes there is no schoolmaster and no group of inhabitants able to undertake the initial organization. Where communities are within reach of reform societies such as the Servants of India Society, the work of inauguration may be done by them. In some districts missionary workers, and in some, members of the Y.M.C.A., have stepped into the breach. When no voluntary organizer is available, much of the work is in the hands of junior clerks of District Central Banks.

With few exceptions those who look for development through co-operation urge the replacement of outside control,<sup>1</sup> except for the specialized work which would be done by experts in any country, by autonomy as far as possible and as quickly as possible. The hope of this adds bitterness to the regret that is frequently expressed that members are slow to understand the implications of co-operation, and that they tend to think of the societies as convenient and cheap substitutes for moneylenders. The power of sustained effort that is needed to repay loans, to avoid fresh debts, to borrow only for productive use and not for consumption, and to reconstruct homesteads and village property when these have fallen into disrepair, or to improve them, can only be learned gradually. For this reason it is sometimes urged that education in co-operative ideals should precede the initiation of societies.<sup>2</sup> Mr. Manalal C. Mehta, I.C.S.,<sup>3</sup> urges the importance of including the study of the elements and general methods of co-operation in the curriculum of all colleges for the training of primary school teachers, and of introducing classes on the same subject in high schools

<sup>1</sup> Professor J. C. Coyajee of Presidency College, Calcutta, in an article entitled "Some Lines of Co-operative Progress," published in the *Indian Journal of Economics*, vol. ii, part iv, advocates the organization of a highly paid, permanent, graded "Indian Co-operative Service." See also, on this subject, but in contrast to the views of Professor Coyajee, the article in vol. iii, part i, of the same journal, by Mr. C. F. Strickland, I.C.S.

<sup>2</sup> See reference to this subject in a Paper submitted to the Conference of Welfare Workers held in Bombay in April 1922, by Mr. S. Ganesh Devrukhkar, Auditor, Co-operative Societies' Welfare Work, Bombay.

<sup>3</sup> See "Some Notes on the Practice of Co-operation," *Indian Journal of Economics*, vol. ii, part iii, p. 361.





and colleges. The Servants of India Society has been in the van in educative work in this direction. A training class in co-operative methods has been opened in Bombay under its auspices. It has also inaugurated an Institute for the study of co-operation and of problems connected with its development.

The villagers of Hadapsar, five miles from Poona, formed a specially successful Co-operative Society under the leadership of members of the Servants of India Society. In 1921 it had already been in operation for more than ten years, and was still setting itself new tasks and undertaking new responsibilities. At a little distance from the village, the road by which it was approached from the Poona side became firm and smooth, a fact that was speedily recalled to mind when the secretary of the society mentioned that the latter had undertaken the improvement of the roads in the immediate vicinity. A Sanitary Committee had already improved conditions within the village. In the surrounding district at least ten new wells had been sunk. It is obvious that co-operation here has not confined itself to the securing of credit at a moderate rate of interest. It has extended widely into other fields. Members have formed a cane-crushing society, have opened a co-operative grocer's shop, and have taken a vital interest in the progress of education amongst the villagers.<sup>1</sup> The secretary, who owns land in the neighbourhood, gave up a more lucrative post to come back to his own village and join in the new spirit of enterprise that was apparent there, at a salary of fifty rupees a month.<sup>2</sup> Keeness of interest and vitality were not confined to the committee of the society. During a pause when nothing special was going on in the quiet street there was an eager, whispered conversation amongst a group of children, followed by the brief disappearance of one of the bigger boys. After a rapid dive into a courtyard, he reappeared with a small, new, child's tricycle on to which the tiniest of the group, a three-year-old or

<sup>1</sup> In co-operation with a Mission School.

<sup>2</sup> Fifty rupees a month is the uniform salary permitted to members of the Servants of India Society. Obviously leaders who travel must have their expenses paid.



...ereabouts, clambered. He pedalled away down the road, expressing in poise of head and shoulders, in laughter and in the quick motion of the sturdy brown limbs, the joy of self-expression before an impressed audience!

A few notes gleaned from a review of the first seven years of this society will serve to suggest the lines on which such groups may develop. The membership in 1917<sup>1</sup> included one hundred and forty-two men and nineteen women. It is interesting to notice that the latter were not merely nominal members.<sup>2</sup> In the previous year they had deposited three thousand four hundred and ten rupees, while the other members had deposited thirteen thousand two hundred and three rupees. A still more striking point appears when the deposits from non-members for the same year are examined. Of these latter deposits men paid in over seventeen thousand rupees, and women almost five thousand five hundred.<sup>3</sup> About four thousand rupees of buried money had been unearthed and entrusted to the care of the new society.

Another specially interesting point noted in this review is the representative nature of the membership, which included at that date five Brahmans, five Muslims, one Indian Christian, thirteen of those belonging to the untouchable classes, and a large number of Marathas of different castes.

Such a centre encourages imitation. The interest it arouses beyond the circle of those already connected with Co-operative Movements can be judged by the fact that it has been visited by Chiefs of Indian States, one of whom, after he had seen the developments at Hadapsar, invited six members of the society to visit his State,

<sup>1</sup> The society was formed in 1910.

<sup>2</sup> It is found important to secure not only the eligibility of women as members of societies, but also their actual presence at meetings in order to prevent difficulties in organization. If the wives are not present their husbands tend to slip away to consult them and to come back with their minds made up. In such cases the decisions that the meeting had been moving towards and may have concluded when some were absent are apt to be upset.

<sup>3</sup> It is important to remember that Hadapsar is in a district in which sugar-cane is grown and is within five miles of Poona, and that the market of the latter greatly increases the opportunities of earning money that are open to the cultivators around, both men and women. Some of the poorest people in the village—widows and labourers—had made deposits.





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in order to lecture on the ideals of co-operation from village to village.

When attention is withdrawn from instances of the work of the general movement in its strongest department, and turned towards the achievements of co-operation in industrial areas, it is found that but little advance has been made. The difficulties in the way are great. In contrast to the settled groups of people in country areas the co-operative pioneer in the city may have the greatest difficulty in finding even ten men on whom he can count as permanent residents in the fluctuating population. When the society is at last formed it is found that members vanish into the mofussil, leaving debts behind them. There are also many complications that arise through the want of intimacy amongst the members, and the consequent lack of grounds on which to judge of the eligibility of candidates. Much of the success that has been won by country societies, and much of their value educationally has been due to the system of mutual and unlimited liability in operation. In a community whose members are continually changing, and, even while in the locality, have little knowledge of each others habits and characters, it is almost impossible to enforce any kind of joint responsibility. Even if it were possible to enforce it, what security has the industrial labourer to offer? The fact that it would be to his advantage to join a Credit Society suggests that he is not a skilled workman with a permanent salary on which his co-members can count. Even if he has still retained joint rights in land, his home may be hundreds of miles away, and any property possessed by him there is of no practical value to his society. He is scarcely likely to have need for credit for any productive purpose, so that there is nothing to depend on except his future thrift, his honesty, and his power to go on working. It is obvious that such societies must be largely financed by employers,<sup>\*</sup> and that they can neither have the economic value nor the educational

<sup>\*</sup> An interesting survey of the possible relationships between employers and Credit Societies is given by Mr. W. H. Wiser, in an article entitled "The Co-operative Credit Method of Promoting Thrift," *British Indian Crafts*, vol. i, No. 8, August 1922.



Some of village societies unless some very strong invigorating influence is brought to bear on members by leaders and organizers.

In the city the movement suffers perhaps more severely from the illiteracy of its members than in the country. The absence of education is much more liable to be the cause of misunderstandings where the associations of the members are different. Near neighbours often come from widely separated homes. The jealousy shown towards such societies by overseers and clerks in factories is another cause of difficulty. These men sometimes act as money-lenders themselves, or work into the hands of individual banias outside of the factory. Through these transactions their power over the workers is strengthened, and they naturally dislike any innovation which will threaten it.

The suggestion made by Mr. N. K. Roy,<sup>\*</sup> that headmen and foremen should be enrolled as members and supervisors of societies, because through their position they would have knowledge of the character of the workers and so be able to assess credit, would be difficult to carry out until education has modified the relationship between overseer and worker. Its adoption would in any case involve certain limitations with regard to grouping and size, unless the sirdars entered as ordinary members with no prior claim to leadership (a condition that for other reasons would be unworkable). If the overseers are to be supervisors and are also to share joint liability, it seems inevitable that the society would either increase their power, or else lay on them, as the only richer members, an unreasonable liability.

In spite of all these difficulties some beginnings have been made. Notable among these are the Co-operative Credit Societies connected with the Tata Sons Workmen's Institute and the Currimbhoy Ebrahim's Workmen's Institute. Both these institutes date from the year 1918, and both are organized by the Social Service League, Bombay. In 1921 the latter society conducted twenty-

<sup>\*</sup> See "Promotion of Co-operative Societies among Industrial Workers," a paper submitted to the All-India Industrial Welfare Conference, April 1922.



six Co-operative Credit Societies in the four mills belonging to the Currimbhoy Ebrahim firm, and nine societies in the chawls where workers lived. A feature specially noted in the Report of that year is that in the Pearl Mill, one of the four referred to above, the women have started a society of their own. The Report of the Tata Mills Institute for 1921 goes into greater detail. It also has societies in each of four mills. The membership of the twenty-nine societies represented grew in the year under report from one thousand eight hundred and five to two thousand and sixteen, but the difficulties caused by migration are suggested by the additional note that four hundred and three names were struck off the list of members, and six hundred and fourteen new members added. Two of the mills to which reference has been made have no women in membership. A third has fifty-four women members, and in the fourth the women workers in the reeling and winding departments have been organized and registered as the "Swadeshi Mills Reeling and Winding Departments Co-operative Credit Society."

More has been done in the direction of opening Co-operative Stores<sup>1</sup> in factory areas. In many of these the employers bear much of the initial expense, and provide the manager's salary. In others, the control of the enterprise remains in the employer's hands. In stores of the latter kind there is comparatively little of the educational element, but the idea of co-operation becomes familiar, and the weekly practical benefits are great. The quality of the goods offered and the lack of adulteration that ought to be characteristic of all such enterprises are in themselves of immense value.

The conditions of membership differ in different places. In Sholapur, in a Co-operative Store, whose membership numbers nineteen hundred men and women, the subscription varies in the ratio of wages from four annas to four rupees a year, and members are allowed credit to the extent of twenty-five per cent. of their pay, which is

<sup>1</sup> The difficulties that attend the running of Co-operative Stores in factory areas are graphically pointed out in the article by Mr. Wiser: "A Co-operative Store or What?" in the July number of *British Indian Crafts*, 1922.



deducted when pay day comes. But the entire management seems to be in the hands of the firm. The latter buys in large quantities at wholesale prices, and regulates prices so as to cover cost and working expenses, and the chief difference between this store and the ordinary mill store seems to lie in the fact that only those who pay their quarterly subscription of sums varying from an anna to a rupee are allowed to buy from it.

Suggestions with regard to Co-operative Housing Schemes in mill areas are as yet, except in the case of skilled workers in the higher positions, entirely tentative. The possibility of offering facilities for the worker to build a house with a small plot of ground attached to it, which shall become his property in the course of ten or twenty years during which he shall keep up the payment of instalments of capital and interest, is hedged round with perplexities. The initial cost need be no difficulty to those employers who would be building houses for their workers. The actual expenditure on the greater area of land required under such a scheme might be balanced by the lesser cost of more slightly built houses. The difficulties connected with securing the land would still remain, and the still more urgent difficulties connected with securing privacy and at the same time maintaining sanitary conditions.

The decentralization of industry does not in itself come under the subject of this chapter, but the hopes of its achievement are so closely linked with suggestions for co-operative industries that it seems best to consider it here.

However often the practical difficulties in the way are represented as insurmountable, the question arises again in the mind whether some way of spreading the benefits and lessening the attendant evils of factory employment, by the growing initiation of industries on a small scale, in country areas, could be found.

Even if it should not prove possible to remove industries already established from the crowded areas in the northern part of Bombay, in Ahmedabad, and in some of the districts close to Calcutta, might it not be possible and wise to





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insist that these shall not be still further congested ;<sup>1</sup> that no other cities in or around which modern industry is already gathering shall be allowed to create such conditions, and that a definite effort shall be made to open up new industrial enterprises on the outskirts of districts that are frequently subject to famine conditions, and in areas where mass movements amongst untouchables demand an economic outlet towards a new social status ?

In many of the cotton mills that are already scattered throughout the country, the greater number of the workers come from the immediate neighbourhood of the mills, or from villages within an area of twenty miles, and are not permanently broken off from their old surroundings and associations. In some cases they live on ground that has belonged to their families for many years, and in conditions that are natural to them. There is less crowding,<sup>2</sup> there is the possibility of fresh air, the spaciousness of wide horizons, and there is the hut compound with its goat, the village well with its trees, and the familiar villagers with the power to create public opinion on the one hand and corporate life of a simple kind on the other.

No sooner, however, do the possibilities of such developments define themselves than the echo of the protests of industrialism are heard. There are clear, and, it might seem, decisive reasons for the centralization of enterprise. The transport of raw material and of coal, the export and the internal distribution of manufactured goods, the repair and renewal of machinery, are all facilitated by the massing of mills together. The uncertainty of the cotton crop in any given area adds strength to the arguments against erecting cotton mills that would be expected to depend for raw material on their immediate surroundings. Far more powerful than any of these reasons, however, is the fact that however statistics may be arranged to show the prosperity of a country whose

<sup>1</sup> See *Report of the Indian Industrial Commission, 1916-18*, p. 173. "We think that the railway rate policy which we have recommended would help to diffuse and decentralize industries, and thereby increase the availability, the comfort, and the efficiency of labour." See also pp. 152 f.

<sup>2</sup> Not necessarily a smaller number of people within the hut, but much more available space within reach of it.



trade is increasing, the captains of industry, as it is now conducted, have scarcely any chance of considering the prosperity of a country as their primary aim, even if they wished to do so. The conditions of business are absorbing, and the game, when the director or agent is in it, is so exciting that in the very nature of the case it comes first. And the rules of the game do not refer to the conditions of the rank and file, except as these affect efficiency. The extremely speculative nature of undertakings in cotton and jute further conduces to the massing of industry. The market for both of these products is liable to extraordinary upheavals. Speculation is obviously not the only underlying reason for the argument that there is need of an industrial atmosphere for industry, just as there is need for an educational one for education, but it is probably an influential one. Whether the illustration could not be so used as to strengthen the opposite argument might be open to question. Cambridge and Oxford,<sup>1</sup> it is true, supply a highly specialized atmosphere, but that does not make it necessary for every British school and college to crowd round their suburbs.

It may be granted that if the industrial system is to be allowed to continue to develop without consideration of any other values than those included in technical economics, there is little hope for the growth of healthy, localized industries throughout the Provinces, but if industrialism is capable of modification and can growingly find room within its activities for human values, India has a unique opportunity for making experiments. The social outlook that is denoted by Co-operative Movements has reached her while her modern industries are still in their infancy and the commercial system is to some extent pliable. She has thus, with her resources and her population, the opportunity of leading the van in a new phase of industrialism.

The Commonwealth Trust in Malabar may serve as a type of one line of pioneer effort towards decentralization.

<sup>1</sup> These were cited as illustrations of the same law in educational matters, by an influential Indian mill-owner who emphasized the necessity of securing an industrial atmosphere.





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This Trust now carries on the industrial enterprises, in Malabar and South Kanara, in the Madras Presidency, and those on the Gold Coast in Africa, that were inaugurated by the Basel Mission Trading Company, known latterly as the Basel Mission Industrials. Its activities in India are represented by seven tile works, three weaving factories, one engineering workshop, and several smaller establishments. The shareholders under the Trust receive a fixed cumulative dividend of five per cent. All surplus profits<sup>1</sup> are expended under the direction of a specially appointed Board of Trustees for the promotion of the religious, moral, intellectual, and industrial education and welfare of the populations of the countries in which the profits are earned.

There are three directions in which it is probable that voluntary experiments in industry, undertaken as service to the community, may be expected to differ from the Commonwealth Trust. All the shareholders, temporary or permanent, would be resident in India, or would at least have intimate personal knowledge of India's people ;<sup>2</sup> if more than one enterprise was initiated and carried on under one management, both (or all) the enterprises would be in India, and some opportunity for the gradual admission of workers into co-operation with the management would be introduced.

The fact that no group of country people could by co-operation provide sufficient capital to float an industry of their own should not necessarily veto proposals for co-operative enterprises. Capital and experienced management would be necessary, but it is at least imaginable that men with business capacity might be found, willing to provide capital at a low fixed interest, and to undertake the direction and management of experimental industries. Full success could not be achieved unless the capital lent at first could be paid off when the workers were in a position to take corporate responsibility for the industry. Otherwise the enterprises would be permanently paternal

<sup>1</sup> After provision for reserves and payment of dividends.

<sup>2</sup> The directors of the Commonwealth Trust "reserved for a limited time one-third of the capital for subscription by investors in the Gold Coast and in India."



its management, and would tend to delay the independence of the workers.

The surrounding conditions would suggest how surplus profits should be spent. In certain cases it would be unwise that all should go in wages. But if the idea of service to the community were the controlling one, profits might go, with the approval of the workers, to irrigation, to agricultural machinery, to the building of a port or of a railway, to road-making and sanitation, or to the opening of fresh industrial enterprises on the same lines.

The outline of another method of opening small pioneer industries is given in a paper read by Mr. N. K. Roy<sup>1</sup> to the Conference of Social Workers in Bombay in April 1922. He outlines a proposal for a Co-operative Factory. He acknowledges many difficulties in the way of the immediate realization of his ideal in its fullness. He maintains that "The highest and best scheme is that in which the producers of raw material will own the capital and share the profits of the factory with the workmen engaged in it, from the expert manager down to the commonest unskilled coolie." He suggests that it would be necessary at first to secure directors from those unconnected with the factory, "but interested in the welfare of industrial workers." To meet the difficulty that might be found in getting the producers of raw material to become shareholders, he proposes the creation of Co-operative Sale Societies amongst the growers. The shares in the factory that would otherwise have been held by the cultivators would be held, as a temporary arrangement, by these sale societies.

It is certain that many experiments must be made before definite conclusions can be reached. The persistence of the idea in face of the serious obstacles that are known to lie across its path rouses the hope that a future will open before it. In order to secure this, definite precautions would need to be taken from the first in each instance. In most areas even the slight influx of population which might be necessary would tend to create, on a small scale, the problems of the cities. The founders of

<sup>1</sup> See p. 255.





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the factory would have to consider, not only internal conditions and a just distribution of profits, but also the sanitary conditions of the village and of its surroundings, and the need of securing open spaces for the huts of its immigrants. Where the industry was opened on a larger scale, a definite scheme of village planning would be required, and there would be need for sympathy and imagination if sound sanitary conditions were to be secured without loss of simplicity and homelikeness.

But none of these things are really too difficult for men to achieve if the fallacies with regard to the value of wealth dissociated from communal service were exploded.



## CHAPTER XVIII

## THE PRESENT OUTLOOK

IN the midst of constant change it is difficult to predict the lines on which progress will be most rapid. Many of the efforts that are being made to ameliorate present conditions and to prepare for reconstruction have been mentioned in this study. It may be well, however, to gather these together, and to note in this closing chapter the forces that may be expected to co-operate in the future towards the development of higher standards of life. Instances may be included in which the co-operation is unconscious, members of the co-operating groups believing, in extreme cases, that they are enemies.

It is clear that the problems are not simple ones. The economic situation is fraught with difficulties well-nigh insurmountable. It is no exaggeration to say that there is hardly any part of India in which the ordinary unskilled worker can provide an adequate income for his family, either in agriculture or in industry. The suggestion that the wholesale doubling of wages might remedy this, but would ruin the industry of India, although a generalization that is perhaps incapable of proof, at least attracts attention to the importance of remembering the great extent of the problem, and to the need to seek solutions which will be workable from the first, and which will tend to continued and general prosperity.

But economic advance, unaccompanied by progress in other directions, will not meet the vital needs of the workers of India. Increase of wages alone will be of little avail. Such increase must be accompanied by steady advance in efficiency and in initiative. In order to secure this,





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ignorance and disease must be fought as strenuously as poverty, from which they cannot be sharply separated. In all proposals for progress it is essential to consider whether the efforts suggested will encourage the development of a free, strenuous, and hopeful spirit amongst the workers who have scarcely begun to understand what they desire, and are as yet unable to express their aspirations. Their needs are constantly explained to them, more or less wisely. Already they begin to demand the satisfaction of wants that they cannot define, by methods that they do not understand, and, because of this, advantages gained, even when these are wholly just and good, lose much of their value. These facts emphasize the obligation that lies on those who take an active part in efforts for reform to keep their knowledge of circumstances ahead of the experiments they make. When this is done each new adventure becomes an added source of information for themselves, and, if wisely recorded, for others.

The literature that treats of social conditions has increased greatly since the publication of the findings of the Washington Conference. Formerly reports of commissions and other blue books, and the official reports of factory inspectors, with occasional articles in journals, were the chief sources of information. In the beginning of 1920, special references to women's work in modern industry were hard to find in publications obtainable in Britain. The reports of societies for the training of nurses gave information on the general conditions of women, but threw no light on the effects of differing occupations. The Report of the Indian Industrial Commission,<sup>1</sup> published in 1919, dealt with many questions that affect both men and women, but had no reference<sup>2</sup> to the problems created by the presence of the latter in factories. The abruptness of the change in public interest

<sup>1</sup> *Report of the Indian Industrial Commission, 1916-18*, published by His Majesty's Stationery Office, London. See chap. xvi.

<sup>2</sup> It notes the lightening of the household work of women through the opening of flour and rice mills (p. 162). Its only other references to women are in connection with the cottage industries of Burmah and Assam (pp. 32, 162):



may be gauged by a significant paragraph. In 1920 a Conference of Directors of Industries was held in Simla, to discuss subjects connected with the newly formed Department of Industries.<sup>1</sup> In the course of its proceedings the development on the industrial side of the census of 1921 came under consideration, and the paragraph to which reference has been made found a place in a list of suggested subjects:—

“(iv) The conditions of female labour in industries— Type of women employed ; kind of work done by women ; arrangements regarding maternity, etc. ; birth-rate among women in industrial centres ; comparative rates of wages amongst men and women ; how far women are replacing men in different industrial occupations ; social position and reputation of female workers.”<sup>2</sup>

Unfortunately the census reports are not yet available in this country, nor is it known how far it has been found possible to ascertain and tabulate detailed circumstances. The statistics will, no doubt, throw light on questions still obscure, in spite of many unavoidable inaccuracies.<sup>3</sup> But the point of special interest lies in the fact that the need for knowledge is now recognized and that definite means for securing it are being organized.

In February 1921 the first issue of the *Journal of Indian Industries and Labour*<sup>4</sup> was published. Through its pages and through those of a series of Bulletins, the

<sup>1</sup> Under the Government of India Act of 1919, “Industries” is a transferred subject, to be dealt with by the separate Provinces without interference from the Central Government. Sir Thomas Holland, first President of the Department of Industries, said that one of the functions of this new Department was to be a clearing-house of information through which the experiences of one Province might reach the Directors of Industry in other Provinces.

<sup>2</sup> *Bulletins of Indian Industries and Labour*, No. 1. Proceedings of the First Conference of Directors of Industries, held in Simla in April 1920, p. 49.

<sup>3</sup> The author was in Calcutta at the time of the census, and knew occupants of three houses in Bengal who either received no census papers, or were allowed to keep them permanently as a memento of the occasion. Many of the inhabitants of Calcutta and Madras have no more permanent dwelling than a corner of a roof or the edge of a store verandah. These two facts taken together suggest the danger of building too confidently on results.

<sup>4</sup> Applications for copies of the journal should be addressed to the Superintendent, Government Printing, Calcutta, India.





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Various Industrial Departments throughout the country are kept in touch with new developments and a wider public has access to the results of inquiries on industry and labour. Individual Provinces have adopted different methods in dealing with labour questions and seeking to gain accurate information. The Labour Office in Bombay makes the results of its researches accessible through the pages of the *Labour Gazette*. References to labour problems and to the conditions of women's employment are to be found in newspapers, journals, and reports in every part of India. As discussion and inquiry crystallize into legislation, their results, so far as these take the form of enactments, appear in the bulletins and reports of the International Labour Office.<sup>1</sup>

Of the more prominent Indian Samajes,<sup>2</sup> the Arya Samaj is the one that has come into closest touch with social conditions, but even it is in no direct contact with any large bodies of mill workers. It stands for the revival of certain elements in Hinduism, and claims to found its tenets on the Vedas as they stood before caste and idolatry were introduced. In its efforts to improve the position of outcastes and to break their untouchability, it finds itself faced by keen opposition, not only from those who maintain caste divisions from religious motives, but also from others less interested in such questions who see their power over labour<sup>3</sup> melting before their eyes.

The branches of the Brahmo Samaj maintain the doctrine of the brotherhood of man, but they have scarcely touched the masses. The influence of their teaching, however, has had its effect beyond the circle of their adherents, and individual members have given, and do give, devoted service to the cause of social progress.

<sup>1</sup> International Labour Office, Geneva. Correspondent of the International Labour Office for Great Britain, Mr. J. E. Herbert, 26, Buckingham Gate, London, S.W. 1.

<sup>2</sup> The Mission to the Depressed Classes in Bombay is carried on by members of the Prathna Samaj (Prayer Society) who take part in educational work also. Through those of the depressed classes who are employed in mills the workers of this Samaj are brought into close contact with the conditions of modern industry.

<sup>3</sup> In the instances referred to the workers were cultivators.



The Servants of India Society, founded in 1905 by Mr. G. P. Gokhale, had already dealt with many sides of industrial life before the happenings of 1919 brought its work into greater publicity. It is a non-sectarian association which draws its members chiefly from among Brahmans, though other Hindus and at least one Muslim and one Indian Christian have entered its brotherhood. The training for the life-long national service to which those who join the society pledge themselves extends over a period of five years. Its members form the nucleus of the Social Service League, which has done valuable intensive work amongst mill employés in Bombay. A prominent aim in the work of the society is the creation of a spirit of co-operation among different races and communities, and the success of pioneer efforts in this direction may be judged by the fact that in 1918, during an epidemic of influenza in Bombay, it received co-operation in relief work from twenty-five different institutions or societies.

The sister association, known as the Seva Sadan, devotes much of its energy to the training of women as teachers, nurses, midwives, and sub-assistant surgeons. Its objects are to help towards the realization of an enlightened and educated womanhood, to provide schools for citizenship, and to prepare for a widened sphere of responsibility. It also provides homes, dispensaries, and classes for poor women and children, "irrespective of creed and caste." As yet its work has scarcely touched factory areas. The spirit in which it studies the special needs it has already tackled, and its careful efforts to study conditions and results of treatment, suggests that with further development and increased resources, it might become a vital force amongst industrial women in Bombay.

The pages of the *Indian Social Reformer* \* which contain reports of conferences of social workers and articles that draw attention to many aspects of reform, cannot fail to rouse ever-wider interest in problems that were scarcely acknowledged ten years ago. The work of the

\* The Editor, Mr. K. Natarajan, is General Secretary of the Indian National Social Conference during this year.





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earliest pioneers may count on increasing support and on a new atmosphere of interest.

There is still complete apathy in many quarters and, in others, much light-hearted and superficial discussion of easy methods of amelioration, but currents of a new kind of concern for the welfare of those whose degraded position has been taken for granted for centuries are leavening public thought, are bearing in on opinion, and are gaining strength. The workers are influenced by them, and even though they may resent the ways in which new ideas are brought to bear on their lives, the fact that they matter and that people realize that they matter, has a power to create that spirit of hopefulness without which they can never be expected to claim a share in the nation's progress with the confidence that ensures success. As a result of a gradual change of attitude, the aspiration of the people may be expected to go out to meet the desire of idealists for universal education, and the village school will no longer be, as it so often is at present, a place to which a few children go reluctantly or irregularly, and add to the apathy of an already discouraged teacher, but a centre of social interest where character and knowledge grow together.

The formation of the All-India Industrial Welfare Conference<sup>1</sup> in 1922 marks a definite stage in the social history of factory workers. An account of the more important reports submitted to the first Conference, at which the permanent Association was formed, is given by Miss Broughton.<sup>2</sup> It is interesting to notice that while the experiments to which she refers cover a wide range, the names of the same mills occur again and again. Nine firms only are mentioned,<sup>3</sup> though the number of factories represented is more than twenty. Much work that is included under welfare is done in mills from whose management no reports were received, in Sholapur, for instance,

<sup>1</sup> The first conference was held in Bombay under the auspices of the Social Service League. Mr. A. C. Chatterjee, I.C.S., Secretary to the Government of India, Department of Industries, was elected President of the Conference.

<sup>2</sup> See p. 179.

<sup>3</sup> Two of the firms are not engaged in textile manufactures.



as in Bengal; but when allowance is made for that it is still evident that only a comparatively small number of employers have embarked on persistent efforts for the improvement of conditions of labour. It is well to remember this, lest too sanguine a view of what has been achieved be accepted. Criticism and suspicion of welfare work have sprung up in India alongside of the work itself. The name is unfortunate, carrying with it the suggestion of efforts for definite groups of workers rather than that of social co-operation towards better relationships throughout the community, and the substitution of the word "personnel," which was adopted at the International Welfare Conference<sup>1</sup> in France in July 1922, is scarcely likely to remove the suspicion of paternalism. But the work itself is done, in many instances, by those whose hopes are centred on the emancipation of the workers, and the spirit that inspires them enables them to act as interpreters to those whose needs call out their sympathy and labour, and to triumph over prejudice.

The All-India Industrial Welfare Conference dissociated itself from partisanship by adopting a resolution, presented by Mr. K. V. Deodhar, senior member of the Servants of India Society, in these words:—

"This Conference appeals to the employers of labour as well as to the advocates of Trade Unionism to recognize the necessity and the desirability of welfare work, and wishes to place on record that the Welfare Work Movement does not wish to interfere with the Labour Movement taking as it does its stand on the principles of humanity and industrial efficiency irrespective of differences between Capital and Labour."

There is little to encourage the hope that, except in Ahmedabad, the influence of Trade Unions on conditions of labour in factories will be powerful in the immediate future.

The All-India Trade Union Congress, and the Central Labour Federation, by which it is represented, seem to have done little in Bombay. There is no active Trade Union among cotton-mill workers in that city. Even

<sup>1</sup> The Conference resolved to prepare a draft constitution for the proposed International Personnel Association.





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in well-established Unions amongst railway employees and Port Trust workers, the membership has declined during the past year. The Ahmedabad Labour Union is engaged in a lengthened dispute with the Mill-owners' Association with regard to the lowering of wages by one-fifth. This reduction was proposed by the Board of the Employers' Association on December 2, 1922. After negotiation, which failed to achieve a settlement, the employers decided, on March 15, 1923, to carry the reduction into effect in the beginning of April. On March 16th the workers met, and were called on by their President, Ansuyabai Sarabhai, to draw their full wages on March 31st, and to cease work. The added advice to those who were immigrants to go at once to their villages, no doubt helped to secure the order that has prevailed in the city. On April 1st fifty-six mills out of a total of sixty-one<sup>1</sup> were closed because of the absence of workers. It is estimated that forty-eight thousand workpeople are affected. If the Labour Union of Ahmedabad emerges from this struggle with unimpaired strength, it will have still further justified its position as a pioneer in the effort to organize the workers in textile factories.<sup>2</sup>

The causes that tend to delay the effectiveness of Trade Unions retard the formation of Co-operative Societies amongst mill workers, but no review of the forces that are working towards the raising of standards would be complete which did not take into account the success of existing experiments and the probability that, as settled industrial communities increase, Co-operative Associations formed within them will prove as valuable to the workers as the Co-operative Credit Societies have already done amongst agriculturalists.

It is only necessary to follow the questions in the Legislative Assembly and in the Provincial Councils to realize how persistent is the demand for legislation on industrial subjects. During the course of 1923, an Act to amend

<sup>1</sup> Three mills not belonging to the Mill-owners' Association decided not to reduce wages for the present. The two remaining mills, though within the Association, also refused to comply with the decision in favour of reduction.

<sup>2</sup> The Mill-owners' Association and the Labour Union arrived at a compromise on June 4th.



The Indian Mines Act of 1901 and a Workmen's Compensation Act<sup>1</sup> have been passed by the Legislature. Considerable dissatisfaction has been expressed with regard to the former, because absolute prohibition of the employment of women below ground did not find a place in the Act.<sup>2</sup> The Select Committee to which the Bill was referred expressed the hope that Local Governments would deal with this question with a view to the prohibition of such employment either in all mines, or in certain classes of mines within a period of about five years. Over eighty thousand women are at present employed in mines, of whom more than forty-two thousand work below ground.

Special interest attaches to the demand for the repeal of the Workman's Breach of Contract Act, passed in 1859, and of sections in the Indian Penal Code under which workmen who break their contracts are liable to fine and imprisonment. Apparently little use has been made of these enactments of late. The agitation for their removal from the Statute Book has brought their existence into prominence.

Great importance attaches to the discussion that has been aroused on the question of arbitration and conciliation.<sup>3</sup> There seems to be general agreement that legislation will be permissive only, but there is an urgent demand that Provincial Governments should be in a position to provide Conciliation Boards, to assist in the settlement of labour disputes when such assistance is requested by both parties. Effective Works Committees would often prevent the need for arbitration, and the discussion of the latter is bringing this fact into prominence. Conciliation, however, has not waited for official organization to become a power in India. Individual arbitrators, and elected boards have been successful in guiding to an agreement employers and labourers who could not of themselves find a way out. Mr. C. F. Andrews<sup>4</sup> is one

<sup>1</sup> See *Labour Gazette*, April 1923, for the text of the Act.

<sup>2</sup> See Report of All-India Trade Union Congress, Lahore, March 1923.

<sup>3</sup> See "Conciliation and Arbitration," *Bulletins of Indian Industries and Labour*, No. 23, by R. N. Gilchrist, I.E.S.

<sup>4</sup> Author of *The Renaissance in India*, *The Indian Problem*, etc.





of the group of men who work in co-operation with the poet Rabindranath Tagore, at Bolpur, but it may be questioned whether he spends more time in school than he does in dealing with industrial disputes. His influence as an arbitrator owes much to his intimate knowledge of Hindu life and to the fact that he has identified himself with the people of India.

The text of a short Act, which passed the Indian Legislature in March 1922, is published in the *Labour Gazette* for June of that year. It is called the Indian Ports (Amendment) Act, 1922,<sup>1</sup> and it ordains that "the Local Government shall make rules for prohibiting the employment at piers, jetties, landing-places, wharves, quays, docks, warehouses, and sheds, of children under the age of twelve years upon the handling of goods."<sup>2</sup> The passing of this Act was the natural consequence of the decision of Government to ratify the Convention of the Washington Conference on the age of employment, but it leads the mind on to ask how soon it will be possible to free all India's children from the strain of continuous labour. The fulfilment of the demand for free and compulsory education<sup>3</sup> would involve the cessation of child-labour, but the tardiness of progress where legal power to enforce school attendance is already possessed emphasizes the need for special study of the unorganized industries in which the very young are employed.

The growing interest in conditions shown by demands for industrial and educational legislation is in itself an encouraging sign, but the reluctance of Government to legislate without investigation is a necessary safeguard. The reaction that comes when laws produce little result, or lead to unforeseen injustices, is more prejudicial to progress than the delay necessitated by careful preparation.

The effect of the new attitude of public opinion on the minds of employers of labour is difficult to measure. Certain familiar terms are common property in the east as in the west. The extent to which welfare methods

<sup>1</sup> See Indian Ports Act, 1908.

<sup>2</sup> Article 6 (c) of the Draft Convention fixing the minimum age for admission of children to industrial employment.

<sup>3</sup> See p. 212.



and practicable and productive of higher efficiency in Indian surroundings is freely discussed. When consideration is turned to the underlying spirit in which these things are viewed, great differences are found. These are doubtless no greater than those to be found amongst the general public, but they affect conditions more, as all employers, whatever their spirit, wield a direct control on the circumstances in which their employes work.

It is obvious that the director is swayed by influences that do not affect the general public. He is gripped in the world-wide system of industry which allows only a limited variation of action to the individual. But though this is true, the ultimate responsibility lies with those who form his social environment. In all countries the action of the employer is determined by certain accepted values. These values are by no means his alone, but are those held, consciously or unconsciously, by the majority of the members of the community which he serves. It is well to remember in trying to express his position that he is not a product of some unique group of factors, but is in the stream of life that flows around him, and is no more and no less responsible for the circumstances in which he finds himself than are other representative groups of the community.

Bodies of directors, led into their various positions in many cases by some combination of circumstances rather than by choice, find themselves responsible to a large number of shareholders for the capital with which the mills are run. When factories are the property of an individual, this element is absent, but whether the employer be director or owner, he is pressed by competition in his efforts to secure the approval of the consumer. He knows something of what the crash of failure would mean in the speculative game he is playing. His motives are not influenced only by the desire to amass money and to live in luxury (aims which his environment may have fostered in him from childhood). He also wants to run his business well. He has certain standards of fair dealing. He will not willingly descend below these. His life is too full of hard facts to leave room for sentimentality in any direction,





and he has a large number of ascertained judgments, not so much closed to revision as so entirely accepted by his mind that he would no more think of revising them than of questioning whether two and two make four. These judgments have to do with the economic system, with what is possible under it, and with what is not possible. He knows that he individually is not responsible for the system. The system demands labour, and labour is not over-plentiful in India. He must give conditions that will attract it.<sup>1</sup>

India is a country of sudden pestilence and death. The employer's conscience towards his labourers demands that as far as possible he shall secure immunity for them in spite of the added risks they run through being crowded together in congested areas. His social conscience, too, demands that his mills shall not be centres of danger for the community. The sense of responsibility this involves increases as medical and sanitary science progress, and with the more widely spread knowledge of their results. His initiative and willingness to take the risks of new experiments in these directions are constantly checked by the misunderstanding and stultifying opposition with which many of his efforts are met, and by the failure of municipalities, neighbouring landlords, or his own landlord, to co-operate. On education he may say little, but the education that would really be useful to him is the technical education of some of the sirdar's and babu's sons, that he may have a more skilful and more capable body of sub-assistant managers. For the rest he is not sufficiently in touch with his employes to be able even to think what education for all might mean. Any vital realization of the individual lives of the massed crowds of workers that flow through the mill gates is impossible.

If the factory laws seem to be unnecessarily stringent, the employer may be glad to evade the restrictions when it can be done with impunity, and what more convincing argument can he have than the knowledge that the workers themselves are more eager, for the sake of the extra annas,

<sup>1</sup> This holds to a limited extent. Circumstances may send an overplus of labour to a very poorly conditioned mill.



are too young or to stay after hours, than his managers are to have them? Further, whatever the employer may wish, there stands between him and the mass of labouring men and women, the management, and the sirdar. The manager implies, and with reason, though he may not always say, that he knows more about the workpeople than the director does. The former may well be, and often is, in more kindly touch with his workers than the latter, but that may mean, for practical purposes, only that he is more aware of the inscrutability of the great silent life that flows on under the babel of talk, more conscious of the difficulty of introducing change, more thoroughly acquainted with the almost insuperable barrier created by the overseer.

There are many employers to-day who are willing to expend time and energy and large sums of money, who yet hesitate because they do not know how to attack the problems they wish to solve, nor on what lines they may most wisely advance. There is a peculiar interest about the enthusiasm of the really keen Indian director or manager or mill doctor. The whole outlook is so new, developing as it does alongside his growing sense of nationality, and in the midst of prejudices and preconceptions from which he, along with his workers, is breaking free, that it calls out an eagerness and simplicity that have great charm. Such men and employers of other races who also have at heart the welfare of the country in which their work is found, are eager to take advantage of knowledge gained by others, and to put into operation suggestions that are practical and well thought out. For their guidance there is now, available in articles and in reports, an increasing accumulation of information, gained by pioneer firms and by those who have taken part in the development of welfare work.

If comparison is made between the activity of to-day and the apathy of twenty years ago, the signs of progress in definite directions are encouraging, but when the mind turns to consider the whole situation, no facile optimism is possible. In face of the economic situation, in face of the illiteracy of the workers, in face of the intricacy





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of the problems involved, the advance already made, complicated as it is in many directions by new questions of its own creation, gives little cause for light-hearted hopefulness. But a convinced pessimism is equally false to facts. It is not by present achievements that the future can be measured, but by those things that lie behind efforts towards reconstruction, not in India alone, but throughout the world. It is the distinction of human nature to seek to do that which is obviously beyond its power. Centuries ago Leonardo da Vinci turned from his easel once and again to consider, to handle, and to adjust his models of wings for flight. His dream was beyond the power at his disposal, but it was the expression of a human aspiration whose fulfilment lay in the future. To-day, not one isolated artist in Italy, but multitudes who labour with hand and with head in many lands, turn from their ordinary occupations to plan machinery for world-wide co-operation. The machinery is doubtless defective and may achieve little. It will have to give place to that which will again fail and be superseded. But behind the thing planned is the characteristic human impulse to achieve the impossible.

This time it is focussed not on the conquest of material things, but on a conquest over its own nature. If the ugly features of that nature seem more rampant than ever, it is worth while all the more to consider the spirit that is opposed to them. Is it a change in the will of the race that is beginning to make itself felt? Is it the rise of a new courage to attempt the conquest of the unconquerable in an untried sphere of action?



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